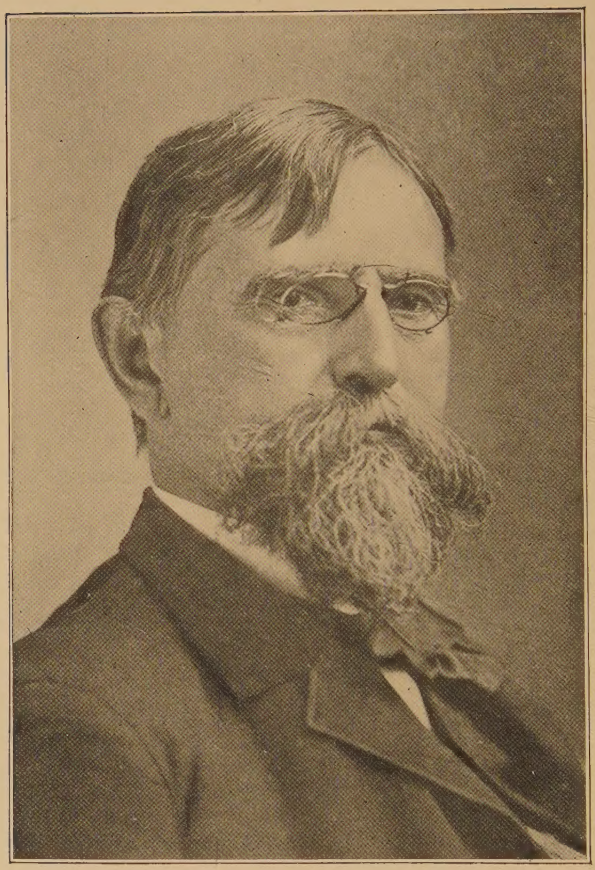
BEN HUR

LEW WALLACE

Carolyn S. Aid
12-25-04

l. M.

BEN-HUR



GENERAL LEW. WALLACE

BEN-HUR

A TALE OF THE CHRIST

BY

LEW. WALLACE

AUTHOR OF "THE BOYHOOD OF CHRIST"
"THE PRINCE OF INDIA" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED FROM DRAWINGS BY
MARTIN JOHNSON
AND PHOTOGRAPHS

VOL. I.

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
1900

BEN-HUR

A TALE OF THE CHRIST

BY

LEW. WALLACE

AUTHOR OF "THE BOYHOOD OF CHRIST"
"THE FAIR GOD" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED FROM DRAWINGS BY
WILLIAM MARTIN JOHNSON
AND PHOTOGRAPHS

VOL. I.

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
1900

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1880, by

HARPER & BROTHERS

In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington

Copyright, 1891, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

Copyright, 1899, by HARPER & BROTHERS

All rights reserved

FROM

GENERAL GARFIELD

TO

GENERAL WALLACE

APRIL 19, 1881

EXECUTIVE MANSION.
WASHINGTON. April 9/81

Dear General

I have, this morning, finished reading "Ben-Hur" - and I must thank you for the pleasure it has given me -

The theme was difficult; but you have handled it with great delicacy and power.

Several of the scenes

such as the wise men in the descent - the Sea fight - the Chariot race - will I am sure take a permanent and high place in literature.

With this beautiful and reverent book You have lightened the burden of my daily life - and renewed our acquaintance which began at Shiloh -

Very truly Yours
J. A. Garfield

Gen. Lew. Wallace
Crawfordsville
Ind.

TO

THE WIFE OF MY YOUTH

WHO

STILL ABIDES WITH ME

"But this repetition of the old story is just the fairest charm of domestic discourse. If we can often repeat to ourselves sweet thoughts without *ennui*: why shall not another be suffered to awaken them within us still oftener."—*Hesp.:* JEAN PAUL F. RICHTER

"See how from far upon the eastern road
The star-led wisards haste with odours sweet.
* * * * * * * *
But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began;
The winds with wonder whist
Smoothly the waters kist,
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean—
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave."
Christ's Nativity: The Hymn—MILTON

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME I

BOOK FIRST

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTO THE DESERT	21
II.	MEETING OF THE WISE MEN	28
III.	THE ATHENIAN SPEAKS—FAITH	35
IV.	SPEECH OF THE HINDOO—LOVE	40
V.	THE EGYPTIAN'S STORY—GOOD WORKS	46
VI.	THE JOPPA GATE	59
VII.	TYPICAL CHARACTERS AT THE JOPPA GATE	65
VIII.	JOSEPH AND MARY GOING TO BETHLEHEM	72
IX.	THE CAVE AT BETHLEHEM	80
X.	THE LIGHT IN THE SKY	93
XI.	CHRIST IS BORN	95
XII.	THE WISE MEN ARRIVE AT JERUSALEM	104
XIII.	THE WITNESSES BEFORE HEROD	109
XIV.	THE WISE MEN FIND THE CHILD	124

BOOK SECOND

I.	JERUSALEM UNDER THE ROMANS	131
II.	BEN-HUR AND MESSALA	136
III.	A JUDEAN HOME	151
IV.	THE STRANGE THINGS BEN-HUR WANTS TO KNOW	159
V.	ROME AND ISRAEL—A COMPARISON	170
VI.	THE ACCIDENT TO GRATUS	181
VII.	A GALLEY SLAVE	200

BOOK THIRD

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	QUINTUS ARRIUS GOES TO SEA	209
II.	AT THE OAR	219
III.	ARRIUS AND BEN-HUR ON DECK	229
IV.	"NO. 60"	240
V.	THE SEA FIGHT	250
VI.	ARRIUS ADOPTS BEN-HUR	260

BOOK FOURTH

I.	BEN-HUR RETURNS EAST	271
II.	ON THE ORONTES	277
III.	THE DEMAND ON SIMONIDES	282
IV.	SIMONIDES AND ESTHER	296
V.	THE GROVE OF DAPHNE	307
VI.	THE MULBERRIES OF DAPHNE	316
VII.	THE STADIUM IN THE GROVE	334
VIII.	THE FOUNTAIN OF CASTALIA	326
IX.	THE CHARIOT RACE DISCUSSED	345
X.	BEN-HUR HEARS OF CHRIST	354
XI.	THE WISE SERVANT AND HIS DAUGHTER	365
XII.	A ROMAN ORGIE	378
XIII.	A DRIVER FOR ILDERIM'S ARABS	393
XIV.	THE DOWAR IN THE ORCHARD OF PALMS	406
XV.	BALTHASAR IMPRESSES BEN-HUR	411
XVI	CHRIST IS COMING—BALTHASAR	420
XVII.	THE KINGDOM—SPIRITUAL OR POLITICAL?	431

FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME I

GENERAL LEW. WALLACE . . . . . *Frontispiece*

TOWER OF DAVID, JERUSALEM . . . . . *faces page* 34

WITHIN THE JAFFA GATE, JERUSALEM 82

TOMBS OF THE KINGS, JERUSALEM . . . . " " 130

THE DEAD SEA . . . . . " " 178

HOUSE OF SAINT VERONICA, JERUSALEM . . " " 226

A PALANQUIN OF THE DESERT . . . . . " " 274

TOWER OF ANTONIA . . . . . " " 322

PILGRIMS ENTERING BETHLEHEM, CHRISTMAS " " 370

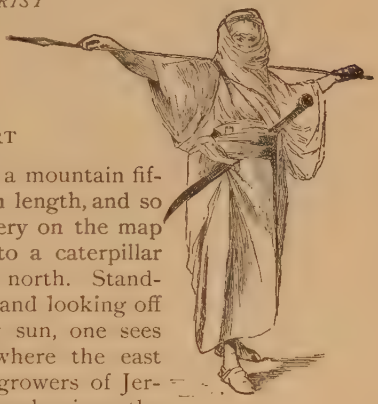
POOL OF BETHESDA . . . . . " " 418

BOOK FIRST

" . . . . . .
The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up! . . ."
—TENNYSON.

BEN-HUR

A TALE OF THE CHRIST



CHAPTER I

INTO THE DESERT

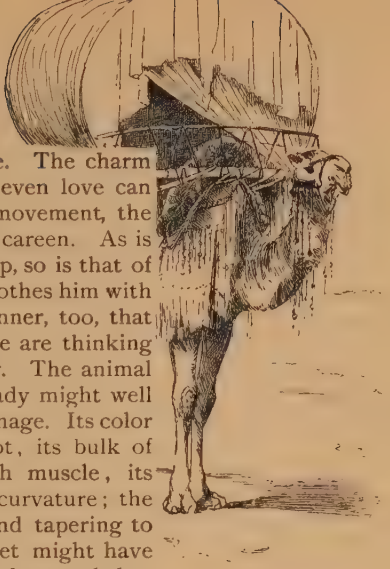
THE Jebel es Zubleh is a mountain fifty miles and more in length, and so narrow that its tracery on the map gives it a likeness to a caterpillar crawling from the south to the north. Standing on its red-and-white cliffs, and looking off under the path of the rising sun, one sees only the Desert of Arabia, where the east winds, so hateful to the vine-growers of Jericho, have kept their playgrounds since the beginning. Its feet are well covered by sands tossed from the Euphrates, there to lie; for the mountain is a wall to the pasture-lands of Moab and Ammon on the west—lands which else had been of the desert a part.

The Arab has impressed his language upon everything south and east of Judea; so, in his tongue, the old Jebel is the parent of numberless wadies which, intersecting the Roman road—now a dim suggestion of what once it

was, a dusty path for Syrian pilgrims to and from Mecca—run their furrows, deepening as they go, to pass the torrents of the rainy season into the Jordan, or their last receptacle, the Dead Sea. Out of one of these wadies—or, more particularly, out of that one which rises at the extreme end of the Jebel, and, extending east of north, becomes at length the bed of the Jabbok River—a traveller passed, going to the table-lands of the desert. To this person the attention of the reader is first besought.

Judged by his appearance, he was quite forty-five years old. His beard, once of the deepest black, flowing broadly over his breast, was streaked with white. His face was brown as a parched coffee-berry, and so hidden by a red kufiyeh (as the kerchief of the head is at this day called by the children of the desert) as to be but in part visible. Now and then he raised his eyes, and they were large and dark. He was clad in the flowing garments so universal in the East; but their style may not be described more particularly, for he sat under a miniature tent, and rode a great white dromedary.

It may be doubted if the people of the West ever overcome the impression made upon them by the first view of a camel equipped and loaded for the desert. Custom, so fatal to other novelties, affects this feeling but little. At the end of long journeys with caravans, after years of residence with the Bedawin, the Western-born, wherever they may be, will stop and wait

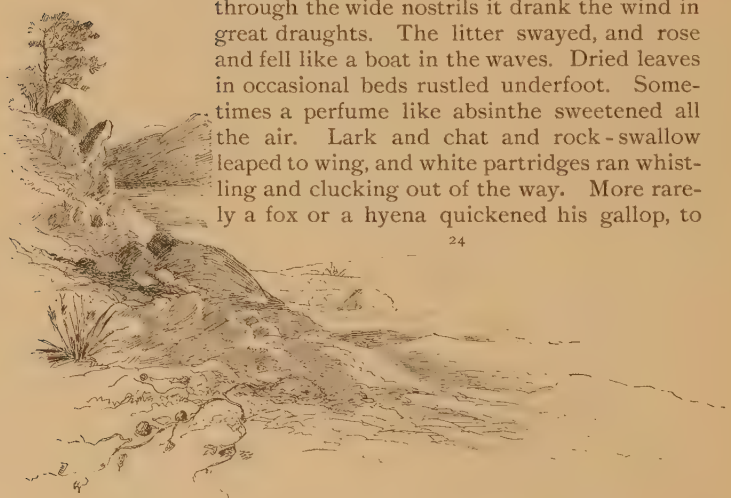


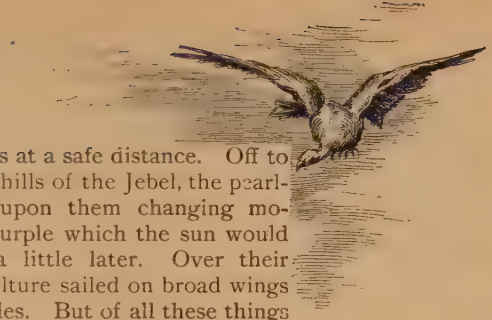
the passing of the stately brute. The charm is not in the figure, which not even love can make beautiful; nor in the movement, the noiseless stepping, or the broad careen. As is the kindness of the sea to a ship, so is that of the desert to its creature. It clothes him with all its mysteries, in such manner, too, that while we are looking at him we are thinking of them: therein is the wonder. The animal which now came out of the wady might well have claimed the customary homage. Its color and height; its breadth of foot, its bulk of body, not fat, but overlaid with muscle, its long, slender neck, of swan-like curvature; the head, wide between the eyes, and tapering to a muzzle which a lady's bracelet might have almost clasped, its motion, step long and elastic, tread sure and soundless—all certified its Syrian blood, old as the days of Cyrus, and absolutely priceless. There was the usual bridle, covering the forehead with scarlet fringe, and garnishing the throat with pendent brazen chains, each ending with a tinkling silver bell; but to the bridle there was neither rein for the rider nor strap for a driver. The furniture perched on the back was an invention which with any other people than of the East would have made the inventor renowned. It consisted of two wooden boxes, scarce four feet in length, balanced so that one hung at each side; the inner space, softly lined and carpeted, was arranged to allow the master to sit or lie half reclined; over it all was stretched a green awning. Broad back and breast straps, and

girths, secured with countless knots and ties, held the device in place. In such manner the ingenious sons of Cush had contrived to make comfortable the sunburned ways of the wilderness, along which lay their duty as often as their pleasure.

When the dromedary lifted itself out of the last break of the wady, the traveller had passed the boundary of El Belka, the ancient Ammon. It was morning-time. Before him was the sun, half curtained in fleecy mist; before him also spread the desert; not the realm of drifting sands, which was farther on, but the region where the herbage began to dwarf; where the surface is strewn with bowlders of granite, and gray and brown stones, interspersed with languishing acacias and tufts of camel-grass. The oak, bramble, and arbutus lay behind, as if they had come to a line, looked over into the well-less waste, and crouched with fear.

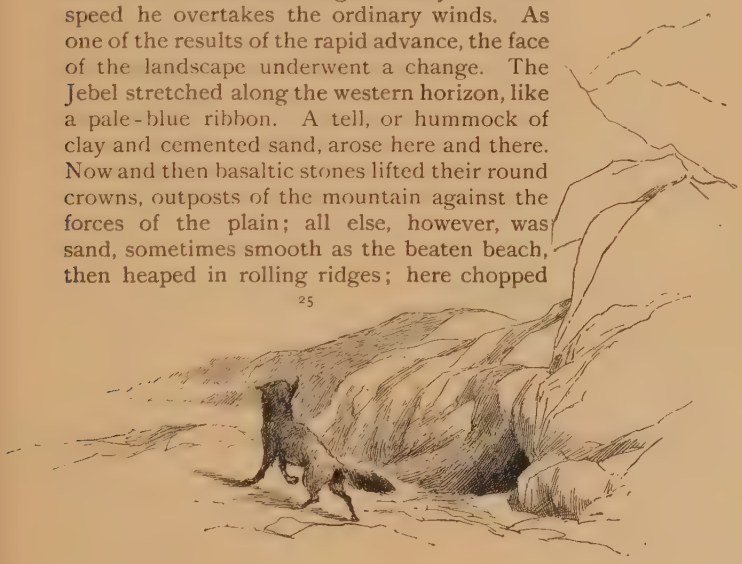
And now there was an end of path or road. More than ever the camel seemed insensibly driven, it lengthened and quickened its pace, its head pointed straight towards the horizon; through the wide nostrils it drank the wind in great draughts. The litter swayed, and rose and fell like a boat in the waves. Dried leaves in occasional beds rustled underfoot. Sometimes a perfume like absinthe sweetened all the air. Lark and chat and rock-swallow leaped to wing, and white partridges ran whistling and clucking out of the way. More rarely a fox or a hyena quickened his gallop, to

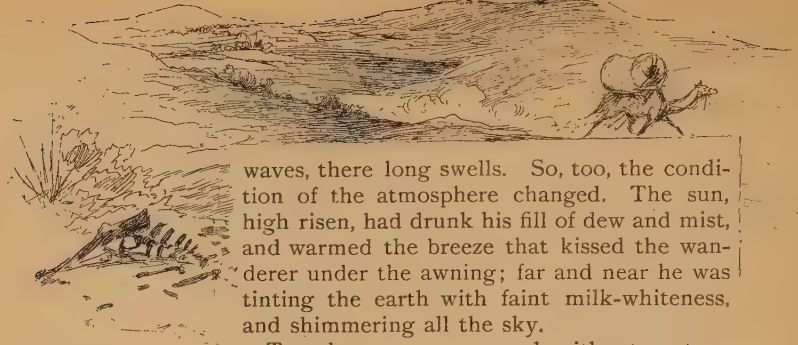




study the intruders at a safe distance. Off to the right rose the hills of the Jebel, the pearl-gray veil resting upon them changing momentarily into a purple which the sun would make matchless a little later. Over their highest peaks a vulture sailed on broad wings into widening circles. But of all these things the tenant under the green tent saw nothing, or, at least, made no sign of recognition. His eyes were fixed and dreamy. The going of the man, like that of the animal, was as one being led.

For two hours the dromedary swung forward, keeping the trot steadily and the line due east. In that time the traveller never changed his position, nor looked to the right or left. On the desert, distance is not measured by miles or leagues, but by the saat, or hour, and the manzil, or halt: three and a half leagues fill the former, fifteen or twenty-five the latter; but they are the rates for the common camel. A carrier of the genuine Syrian stock can make three leagues easily. At full speed he overtakes the ordinary winds. As one of the results of the rapid advance, the face of the landscape underwent a change. The Jebel stretched along the western horizon, like a pale-blue ribbon. A tell, or hummock of clay and cemented sand, arose here and there. Now and then basaltic stones lifted their round crowns, outposts of the mountain against the forces of the plain; all else, however, was sand, sometimes smooth as the beaten beach, then heaped in rolling ridges; here chopped





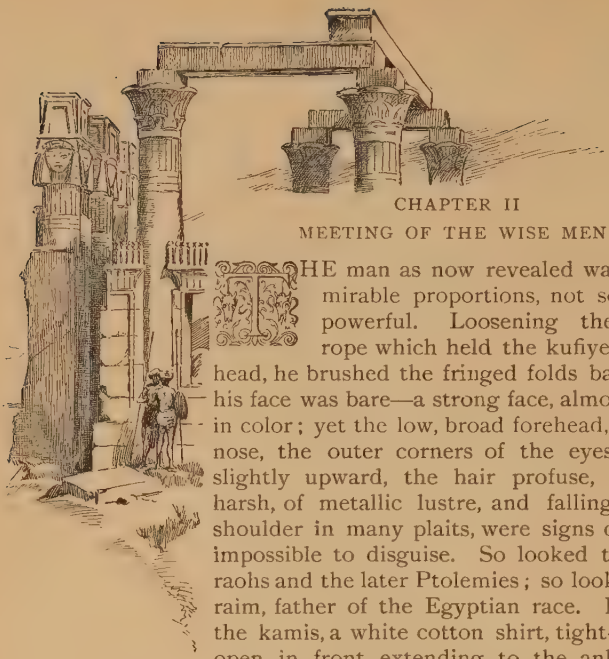
waves, there long swells. So, too, the condition of the atmosphere changed. The sun, high risen, had drunk his fill of dew and mist, and warmed the breeze that kissed the wanderer under the awning; far and near he was tinting the earth with faint milk-whiteness, and shimmering all the sky.

Two hours more passed without rest or deviation from the course. Vegetation entirely ceased. The sand, so crusted on the surface that it broke into rattling flakes at every step, held undisputed sway. The Jebel was out of view, and there was no landmark visible. The shadow that before followed had now shifted to the north, and was keeping even race with the objects which cast it; and as there was no sign of halting, the conduct of the traveller became each moment more strange.

No one, be it remembered, seeks the desert for a pleasure-ground. Life and business traverse it by paths along which the bones of things dead are strewn as so many blazons. Such are the roads from well to well, from pasture to pasture. The heart of the most veteran sheik beats quicker when he finds himself alone in the pathless tracts. So the man with whom we are dealing could not have been in search of pleasure; neither was his manner that of a fugitive; not once did he look behind him. In such situations fear and curiosity are the most common sensations; he was not moved by them. When men are lonely, they stoop to any companion-

ship; the dog becomes a comrade, the horse a friend, and it is no shame to shower them with caresses and speeches of love. The camel received no such token, not a touch, not a word.

Exactly at noon the dromedary, of its own will, stopped, and uttered the cry or moan, peculiarly piteous, by which its kind always protest against an overload, and sometimes crave attention and rest. The master thereupon bestirred himself, waking, as it were, from sleep. He threw the curtains of the houdah up, looked at the sun, surveyed the country on every side long and carefully, as if to identify an appointed place. Satisfied with the inspection, he drew a deep breath and nodded, much as to say, "At last, at last!" A moment after, he crossed his hands upon his breast, bowed his head, and prayed silently. The pious duty done, he prepared to dismount. From his throat proceeded the sound heard doubtless by the favorite camels of Job—Ikh! ikh!—the signal to kneel. Slowly the animal obeyed, grunting the while. The rider then put his foot upon the slender neck, and stepped upon the sand.



CHAPTER II

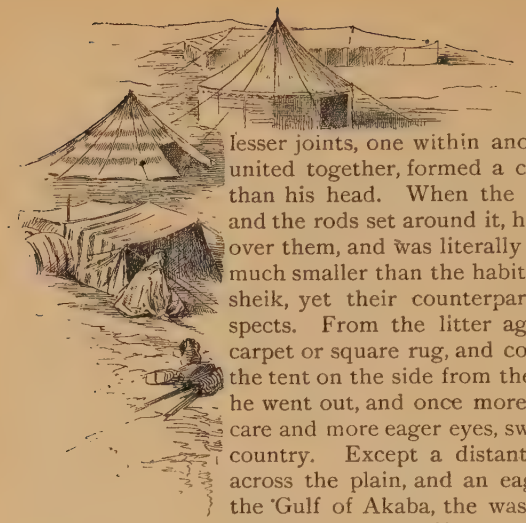
MEETING OF THE WISE MEN

THE man as now revealed was of admirable proportions, not so tall as powerful. Loosening the silken rope which held the kufiyeh on his head, he brushed the fringed folds back until his face was bare—a strong face, almost negro in color; yet the low, broad forehead, aquiline nose, the outer corners of the eyes turned slightly upward, the hair profuse, straight, harsh, of metallic lustre, and falling to the shoulder in many plaits, were signs of origin impossible to disguise. So looked the Pharaohs and the later Ptolemies; so looked Mizraim, father of the Egyptian race. He wore the kamis, a white cotton shirt, tight-sleeved, open in front, extending to the ankles and embroidered down the collar and breast, over which was thrown a brown woollen cloak, now, as in all probability it was then, called the aba, an outer garment with long skirt and short sleeves, lined inside with stuff of mixed cotton and silk, edged all round with a margin of clouded yellow. His feet were protected by sandals, attached by thongs of soft leather. A sash held the kamis to his waist. What was very noticeable, considering he was alone, and that the desert was the haunt of leopards and lions, and men quite as wild, he carried

no arms, not even the crooked stick used for guiding camels; wherefore we may at least infer his errand peaceful, and that he was either uncommonly bold or under extraordinary protection.

The traveller's limbs were numb, for the ride had been long and wearisome; so he rubbed his hands and stamped his feet, and walked round the faithful servant, whose lustrous eyes were closing in calm content with the cud he had already found. Often, while making the circuit, he paused, and, shading his eyes with his hands, examined the desert to the extremest verge of vision; and always, when the survey was ended, his face clouded with disappointment, slight, but enough to advise a shrewd spectator that he was there expecting company, if not by appointment; at the same time, the spectator would have been conscious of a sharpening of the curiosity to learn what the business could be that required transaction in a place so far from civilized abode.

However disappointed, there could be little doubt of the stranger's confidence in the coming of the expected company. In token thereof, he went first to the litter, and, from the cot or box opposite the one he had occupied in coming, produced a sponge and a small gurglet of water, with which he washed the eyes, face, and nostrils of the camel; that done, from the same depository he drew a circular cloth, red-and-white-striped, a bundle of rods, and a stout cane. The latter, after some manipulation, proved to be a cunning device of



lesser joints, one within another, which, when united together, formed a centre pole higher than his head. When the pole was planted, and the rods set around it, he spread the cloth over them, and was literally at home—a home much smaller than the habitations of emir and sheik, yet their counterpart in all other respects. From the litter again he brought a carpet or square rug, and covered the floor of the tent on the side from the sun. That done, he went out, and once more, and with greater care and more eager eyes, swept the encircling country. Except a distant jackal, galloping across the plain, and an eagle flying towards the Gulf of Akaba, the waste below, like the blue above it, was lifeless.

He turned to the camel, saying low, and in a tongue strange to the desert, "We are far from home, O racer with the swiftest winds—we are far from home, but God is with us. Let us be patient."

Then he took some beans from a pocket in the saddle, and put them in a bag made to hang below the animal's nose; and when he saw the relish with which the good servant took to the food, he turned and again scanned the world of sand, dim with the glow of the vertical sun.

"They will come," he said, calmly. "He that led me is leading them. I will make ready."

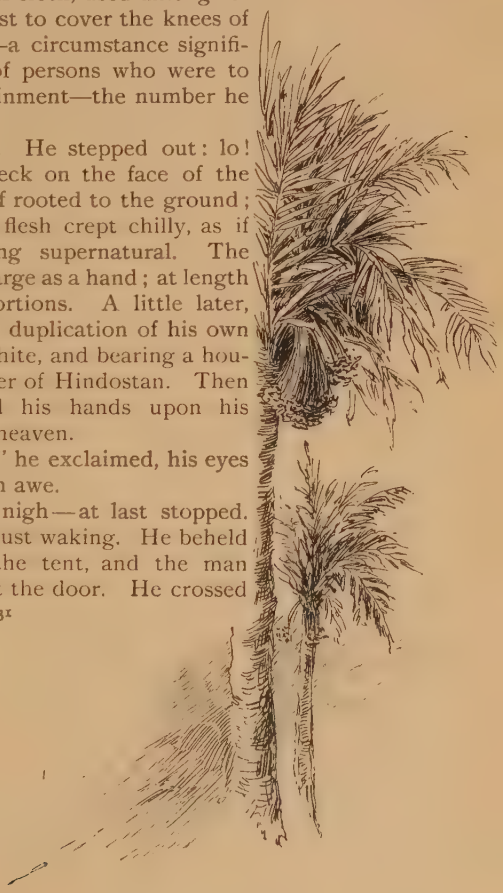
From the pouches which lined the interior of the cot, and from a willow basket which was part of its furniture, he brought forth ma-

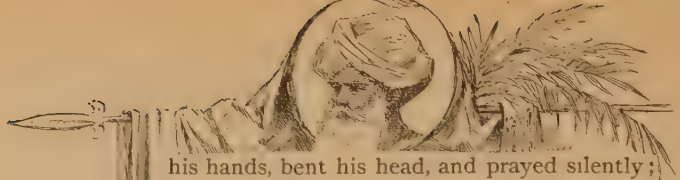
terials for a meal: platters close-woven of the fibres of palms; wine in small gurglets of skin; mutton dried and smoked; stoneless shami, or Syrian pomegranates; dates of El Shelebei, wondrous rich and grown in the nakhil, or palm orchards, of Central Arabia; cheese, like David's "slices of milk;" and leavened bread from the city bakery — all which he carried and set upon the carpet under the tent. As the final preparation, about the provisions he laid three pieces of silk cloth, used among refined people of the East to cover the knees of guests while at table—a circumstance significant of the number of persons who were to partake of his entertainment—the number he was awaiting.

All was now ready. He stepped out: lo! in the east a dark speck on the face of the desert. He stood as if rooted to the ground; his eyes dilated; his flesh crept chilly, as if touched by something supernatural. The speck grew, became large as a hand; at length assumed divine proportions. A little later, full into view swung a duplication of his own dromedary, tall and white, and bearing a houdah, the travelling litter of Hindostan. Then the Egyptian crossed his hands upon his breast, and looked to heaven.

"God only is great!" he exclaimed, his eyes full of tears, his soul in awe.

The stranger drew nigh — at last stopped. Then he, too, seemed just waking. He beheld the kneeling camel, the tent, and the man standing prayerfully at the door. He crossed





his hands, bent his head, and prayed silently; after which, in a little while, he stepped from his camel's neck to the sand, and advanced towards the Egyptian, as did the Egyptian towards him. A moment they looked at each other; then they embraced—that is, each threw his right arm over the other's shoulder, and the left round the side, placing his chin first upon the left, then upon the right breast.

"Peace be with thee, O servant of the true God!" the stranger said.

"And to thee, O brother of the true faith! —to thee peace and welcome," the Egyptian replied, with fervor.

The new-comer was tall and gaunt, with lean face, sunken eyes, white hair and beard, and a complexion between the hue of cinnamon and bronze. He, too, was unarmed. His costume was Hindostani; over the skull-cap a shawl was wound in great folds, forming a turban; his body garments were in the style of the Egyptian's, except that the aba was shorter, exposing wide flowing breeches gathered at the ankles. In place of sandals, his feet were clad in half-slippers of red leather, pointed at the toes. Save the slippers, the costume from head to foot was of white linen. The air of the man was high, stately, severe. Visvamitra, the greatest of the ascetic heroes of the Iliad of the East, had in him a perfect representative. He might have been called a Life drenched with the wisdom of Brahma — Devotion Incarnate. Only in his eyes was there proof of humanity; when he lifted his face from the

Egyptian's breast, they were glistening with tears.

"God only is great!" he exclaimed, when the embrace was finished.

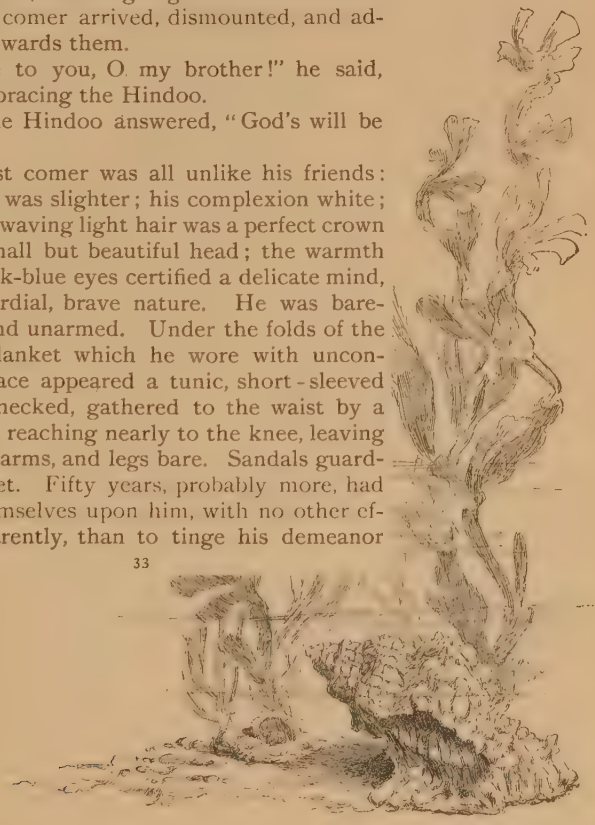
"And blessed are they that serve him!" the Egyptian answered, wondering at the paraphrase of his own exclamation. "But let us wait," he added, "let us wait; for see, the other comes yonder!"

They looked to the north, where, already plain to view, a third camel, of the whiteness of the others, came careening like a ship. They waited, standing together—waited until the new-comer arrived, dismounted, and advanced towards them.

"Peace to you, O my brother!" he said, while embracing the Hindoo.

And the Hindoo answered, "God's will be done!"

The last comer was all unlike his friends: his frame was slighter; his complexion white; a mass of waving light hair was a perfect crown for his small but beautiful head; the warmth of his dark-blue eyes certified a delicate mind, and a cordial, brave nature. He was bareheaded and unarmed. Under the folds of the Tyrian blanket which he wore with unconscious grace appeared a tunic, short-sleeved and low-necked, gathered to the waist by a band, and reaching nearly to the knee, leaving the neck, arms, and legs bare. Sandals guarded his feet. Fifty years, probably more, had spent themselves upon him, with no other effect, apparently, than to tinge his demeanor



with gravity and temper his words with forethought. The physical organization and the brightness of soul were untouched. No need to tell the student from what kindred he was sprung; if he came not himself from the groves of Athené, his ancestry did.

When his arms fell from the Egyptian, the latter said, with a tremulous voice, "The Spirit brought me first; wherefore I know myself chosen to be the servant of my brethren. The tent is set, and the bread is ready for the breaking. Let me perform my office."

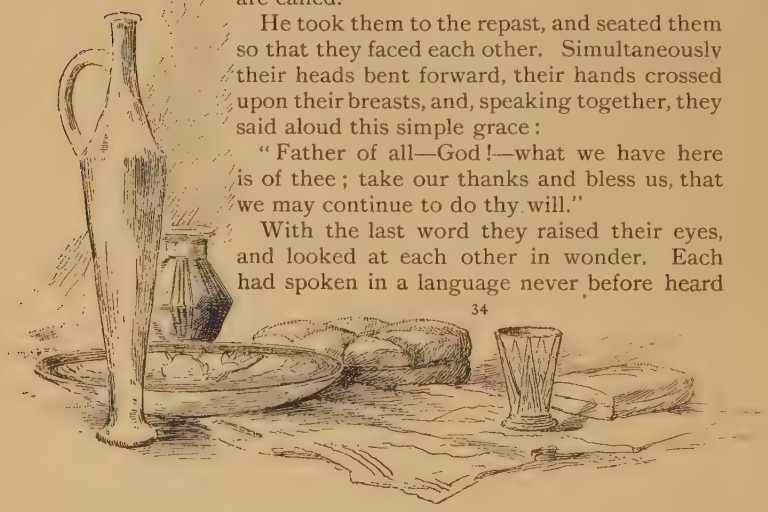
Taking each by the hand, he led them within, and removed their sandals and washed their feet, and he poured water upon their hands, and dried them with napkins.

Then, when he had laved his own hands, he said, "Let us take care of ourselves, brethren, as our service requires, and eat, that we may be strong for what remains of the day's duty. While we eat we will each learn who the others are, and whence they come, and how they are called."

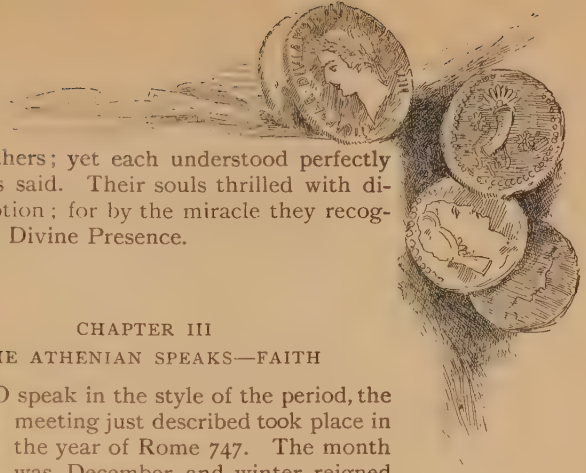
He took them to the repast, and seated them so that they faced each other. Simultaneously their heads bent forward, their hands crossed upon their breasts, and, speaking together, they said aloud this simple grace:

"Father of all—God!—what we have here is of thee; take our thanks and bless us, that we may continue to do thy will."

With the last word they raised their eyes, and looked at each other in wonder. Each had spoken in a language never before heard



TOWER OF DAVID, JERUSALEM



by the others; yet each understood perfectly what was said. Their souls thrilled with divine emotion; for by the miracle they recognized the Divine Presence.

CHAPTER III

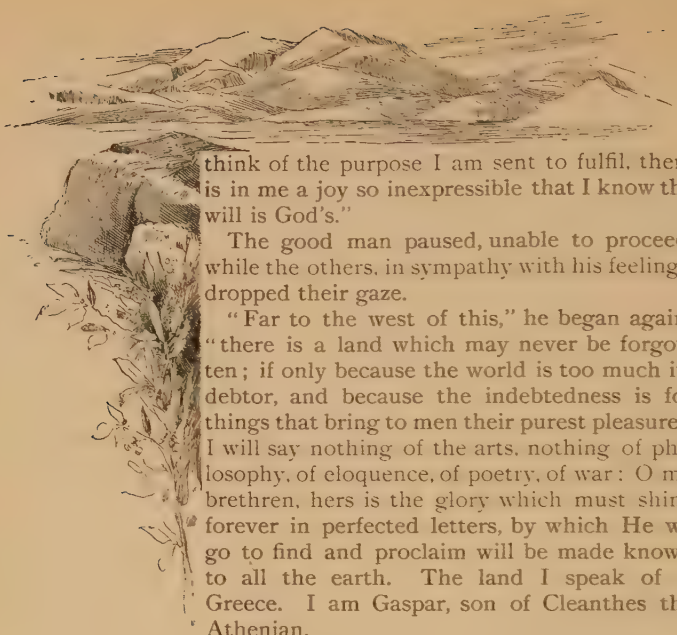
THE ATHENIAN SPEAKS—FAITH

TO speak in the style of the period, the meeting just described took place in the year of Rome 747. The month was December, and winter reigned over all the regions east of the Mediterranean. Such as ride upon the desert in this season go not far until smitten with a keen appetite. The company under the little tent were not exceptions to the rule. They were hungry, and ate heartily; and, after the wine, they talked.

"To a wayfarer in a strange land nothing is so sweet as to hear his name on the tongue of a friend," said the Egyptian, who assumed to be president of the repast. "Before us lie many days of companionship. It is time we knew each other. So, if it be agreeable, he who came last shall be first to speak."

Then, slowly at first, like one watchful of himself, the Greek began:

"What I have to téll, my brethren, is so strange that I hardly know where to begin or what I may with propriety speak. I do not yet understand myself. The most I am sure of is that I am doing a Master's will, and that the service is a constant ecstasy. When I



think of the purpose I am sent to fulfil, there is in me a joy so inexpressible that I know the will is God's."

The good man paused, unable to proceed, while the others, in sympathy with his feelings, dropped their gaze.

"Far to the west of this," he began again, "there is a land which may never be forgotten; if only because the world is too much its debtor, and because the indebtedness is for things that bring to men their purest pleasures. I will say nothing of the arts, nothing of philosophy, of eloquence, of poetry, of war: O my brethren, hers is the glory which must shine forever in perfected letters, by which He we go to find and proclaim will be made known to all the earth. The land I speak of is Greece. I am Gaspar, son of Cleanthes the Athenian.

"My people," he continued, "were given wholly to study, and from them I derived the same passion. It happens that two of our philosophers, the very greatest of the many, teach, one the doctrine of a Soul in every man, and its Immortality; the other the doctrine of One God, infinitely just. From the multitude of subjects about which the schools were disputing, I separated them, as alone worth the labor of solution; for I thought there was a relation between God and the soul as yet unknown. On this theme the mind can reason to a point, a dead, impassable wall; arrived there, all that remains is to stand and cry aloud for help. So I did; but no voice came

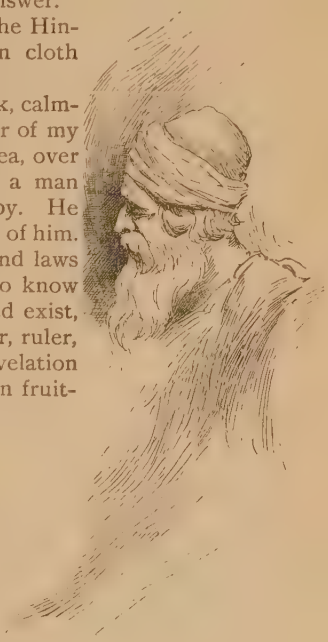
to me over the wall. In despair, I tore myself from the cities and the schools."

At these words a grave smile of approval lighted the gaunt face of the Hindoo.

"In the northern part of my country—in Thessaly," the Greek proceeded to say, "there is a mountain famous as the home of the gods, where Theus, whom my countrymen believe supreme, has his abode; Olympus is its name. Thither I betook myself. I found a cave in a hill where the mountain, coming from the west, bends to the southeast; there I dwelt, giving myself up to meditation—no, I gave myself up to waiting for what every breath was a prayer—for revelation. Believing in God, invisible yet supreme, I also believed it possible so to yearn for him with all my soul that he would take compassion and give me answer."

"And he did—he did!" exclaimed the Hindoo, lifting his hands from the silken cloth upon his lap.

"Hear me, brethren," said the Greek, calming himself with an effort. "The door of my hermitage looks over an arm of the sea, over the Thermaic Gulf. One day I saw a man flung overboard from a ship sailing by. He swam ashore. I received and took care of him. He was a Jew, learned in the history and laws of his people; and from him I came to know that the God of my prayers did indeed exist, and had been for ages their lawmaker, ruler, and king. What was that but the Revelation I dreamed of? My faith had not been fruitless; God answered me!"



"As he does all who cry to him with such faith," said the Hindoo.

"But, alas!" the Egyptian added, "how few are there wise enough to know when he answers them!"

"That was not all," the Greek continued. "The man so sent to me told me more. He said the prophets who, in the ages which followed the first revelation, walked and talked with God, declared he would come again. He gave me the names of the prophets, and from the sacred books quoted their very language. He told me, further, that the second coming was at hand—was looked for momentarily in Jerusalem."

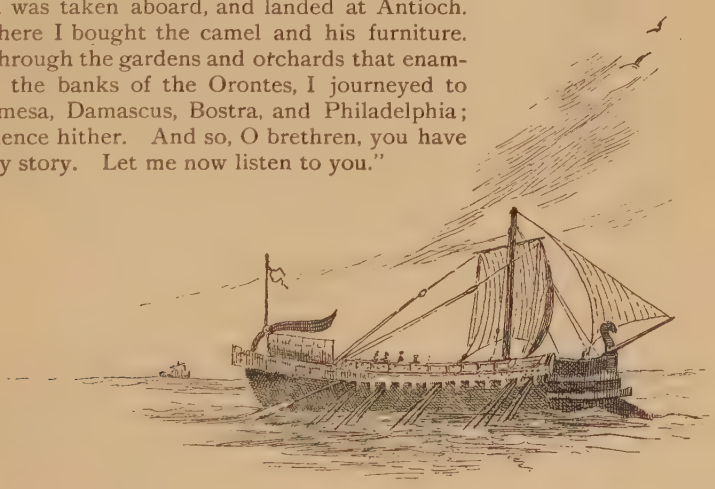
The Greek paused, and the brightness of his countenance faded.

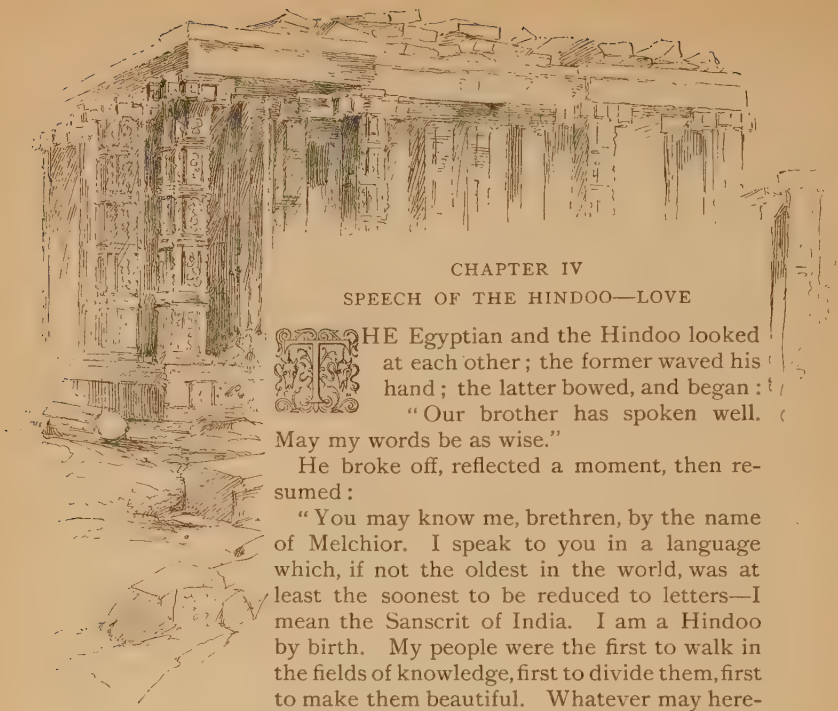
"It is true," he said, after a little—"it is true the man told me that as God and the revelation of which he spoke had been for the Jews alone, so it would be again. He that was to come should be King of the Jews. 'Had he nothing for the rest of the world?' I asked. 'No,' was the answer, given in a proud voice—'No, we are his chosen people.' The answer did not crush my hope. Why should such a God limit his love and benefaction to one land, and, as it were, to one family? I set my heart upon knowing. At last I broke through the man's pride, and found that his fathers had been merely chosen servants to keep the Truth alive, that the world might at last know it and be saved. When the Jew was gone, and I was alone again, I chastened my soul with a new

prayer—that I might be permitted to see the King when he was come, and worship him. One night I sat by the door of my cave trying to get nearer the mysteries of my existence, knowing which is to know God; suddenly, on the sea below me, or rather in the darkness that covered its face, I saw a star begin to burn; slowly it arose and drew nigh, and stood over the hill and above my door, so that its light shone full upon me. I fell down, and slept, and in my dream I heard a voice say:

"'O Gaspar! Thy faith hath conquered! Blessed art thou! With two others, come from the uttermost parts of the earth, thou shalt see Him that is promised, and be a witness for him, and the occasion of testimony in his behalf. In the morning arise, and go meet them, and keep trust in the Spirit that shall guide thee.'

"And in the morning I awoke with the Spirit as a light within me surpassing that of the sun. I put off my hermit's garb, and dressed myself as of old. From a hiding-place I took the treasure which I had brought from the city. A ship went sailing past. I hailed it, was taken aboard, and landed at Antioch. There I bought the camel and his furniture. Through the gardens and orchards that enamel the banks of the Orontes, I journeyed to Emesa, Damascus, Bostra, and Philadelphia; thence hither. And so, O brethren, you have my story. Let me now listen to you."





CHAPTER IV

SPEECH OF THE HINDOO—LOVE

THE Egyptian and the Hindoo looked at each other; the former waved his hand; the latter bowed, and began:

"Our brother has spoken well. May my words be as wise."

He broke off, reflected a moment, then resumed:

"You may know me, brethren, by the name of Melchior. I speak to you in a language which, if not the oldest in the world, was at least the soonest to be reduced to letters—I mean the Sanscrit of India. I am a Hindoo by birth. My people were the first to walk in the fields of knowledge, first to divide them, first to make them beautiful. Whatever may hereafter befall, the four Vedas must live, for they are the primal fountains of religion and useful intelligence. From them were derived the Upa-Vedas, which, delivered by Brahma, treat of medicine, archery, architecture, music, and the four-and-sixty mechanical arts; the Ved-Angas, revealed by inspired saints, and devoted to astronomy, grammar, prosody, pronunciation, charms and incantations, religious rites and ceremonies; the Up-Angas, written by the sage Vyasa, and given to cosmogony, chronology, and geography; therein also are the Ramayâna and the Mahabhârata, heroic poems,

designed for the perpetuation of our gods and demi-gods. Such, O brethren, are the Great Shastras, or books of sacred ordinances. They are dead to me now; yet through all time they will serve to illustrate the budding genius of my race. They were promises of quick perfection. Ask you why the promises failed? Alas! the books themselves closed all the gates of progress. Under pretext of care for the creature, their authors imposed the fatal principle that a man must not address himself to discovery or invention, as Heaven had provided him all things needful. When that condition became a sacred law, the lamp of Hindoo genius was let down a well, where ever since it has lighted narrow walls and bitter waters.

"These allusions, brethren, are not from pride, as you will understand when I tell you that the Shastras teach a Supreme God called Brahm; also, that the Purânas, or sacred poems of the Up-Angas, tell us of Virtue and Good Works, and of the Soul. So, if my brother will permit the saying"—the speaker bowed deferentially to the Greek—"ages before his people were known, the two great ideas, God and the Soul, had absorbed all the forces of the Hindoo mind. In further explanation, let me say that Brahm is taught, by the same sacred books, as a Triad—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Of these, Brahma is said to have been the author of our race; which, in course of creation, he divided into four castes. First, he peopled the worlds below and the heavens

above; next, he made the earth ready for terrestrial spirits; then from his mouth proceeded the Brahman caste, nearest in likeness to himself, highest and noblest, sole teachers of the Vedas, which at the same time flowed from his lips in finished state, perfect in all useful knowledge. From his arms next issued the Kshatriya, or warriors; from his breast, the seat of life, came the Vaisya, or producers—shepherds, farmers, merchants; from his foot, in sign of degradation, sprang the Sudra, or serviles, doomed to menial duties for the other classes—serfs, domestics, laborers, artisans. Take notice, further, that the law, so born with them, forbade a man of one caste becoming a member of another; the Brahman could not enter a lower order; if he violated the laws of his own grade, he became an outcast, lost to all but outcasts like himself."

At this point, the imagination of the Greek, flashing forward upon all the consequences of such a degradation, overcame his eager attention, and he exclaimed, "In such a state, O brethren, what mighty need of a loving God!"

"Yes," added the Egyptian, "of a loving God like ours."

The brows of the Hindoo knit painfully; when the emotion was spent, he proceeded, in a softened voice.

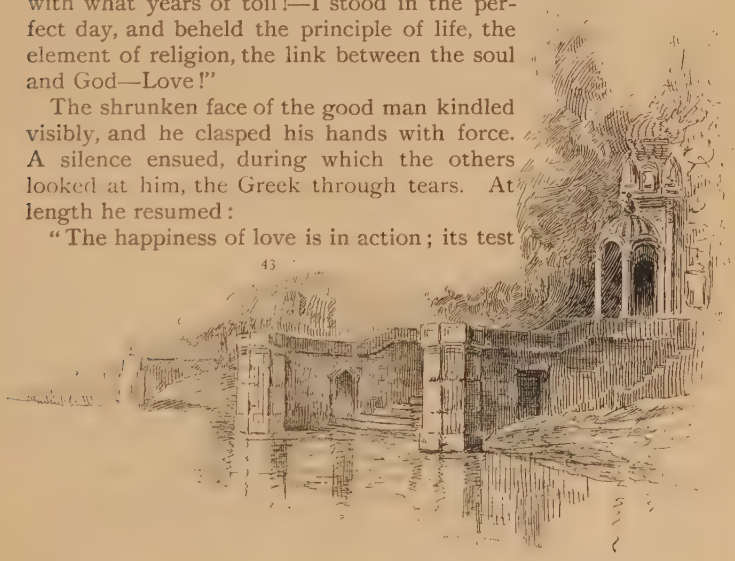
"I was born a Brahman. My life, consequently, was ordered down to its least act, its last hour. My first draught of nourishment; the giving me my compound name; taking me out the first time to see the sun; investing me

with the triple thread by which I became one of the twice-born; my induction into the first order—were all celebrated with sacred texts and rigid ceremonies. I might not walk, eat, drink, or sleep without danger of violating a rule. And the penalty, O brethren, the penalty was to my soul! According to the degrees of omission, my soul went to one of the heavens—Indra's the lowest, Brahma's the highest; or it was driven back to become the life of a worm, a fly, a fish, or a brute. The reward for perfect observance was Beatitude, or absorption into the being of Brahm, which was not existence as much as absolute rest."

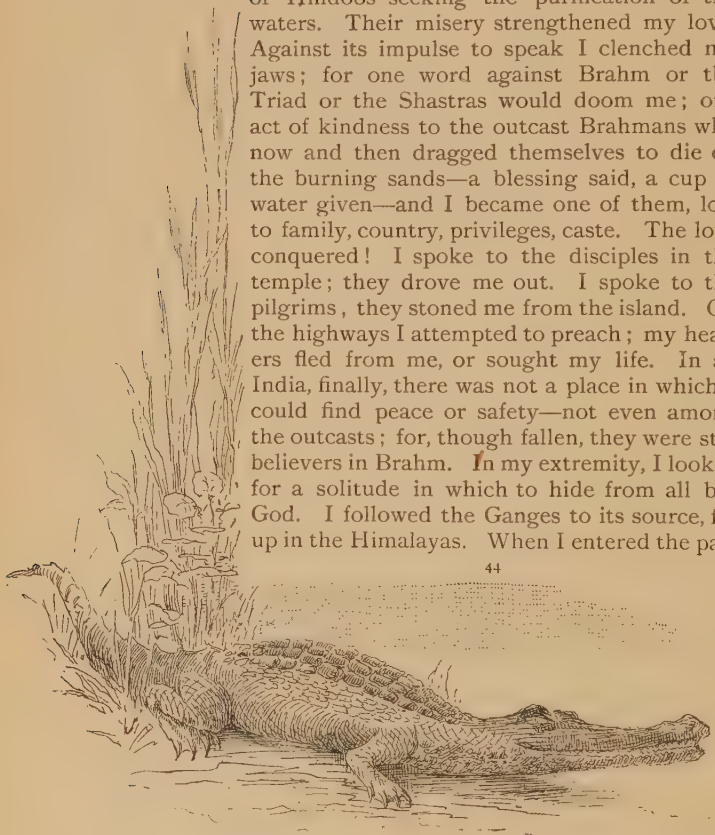
The Hindoo gave himself a moment's thought; proceeding, he said: "The part of a Brahman's life called the first order is his student life. When I was ready to enter the second order—that is to say, when I was ready to marry and become a householder—I questioned everything, even Brahm; I was a heretic. From the depths of the well I had discovered a light above, and yearned to go up and see what all it shone upon. At last—ah, with what years of toil!—I stood in the perfect day, and beheld the principle of life, the element of religion, the link between the soul and God—Love!"

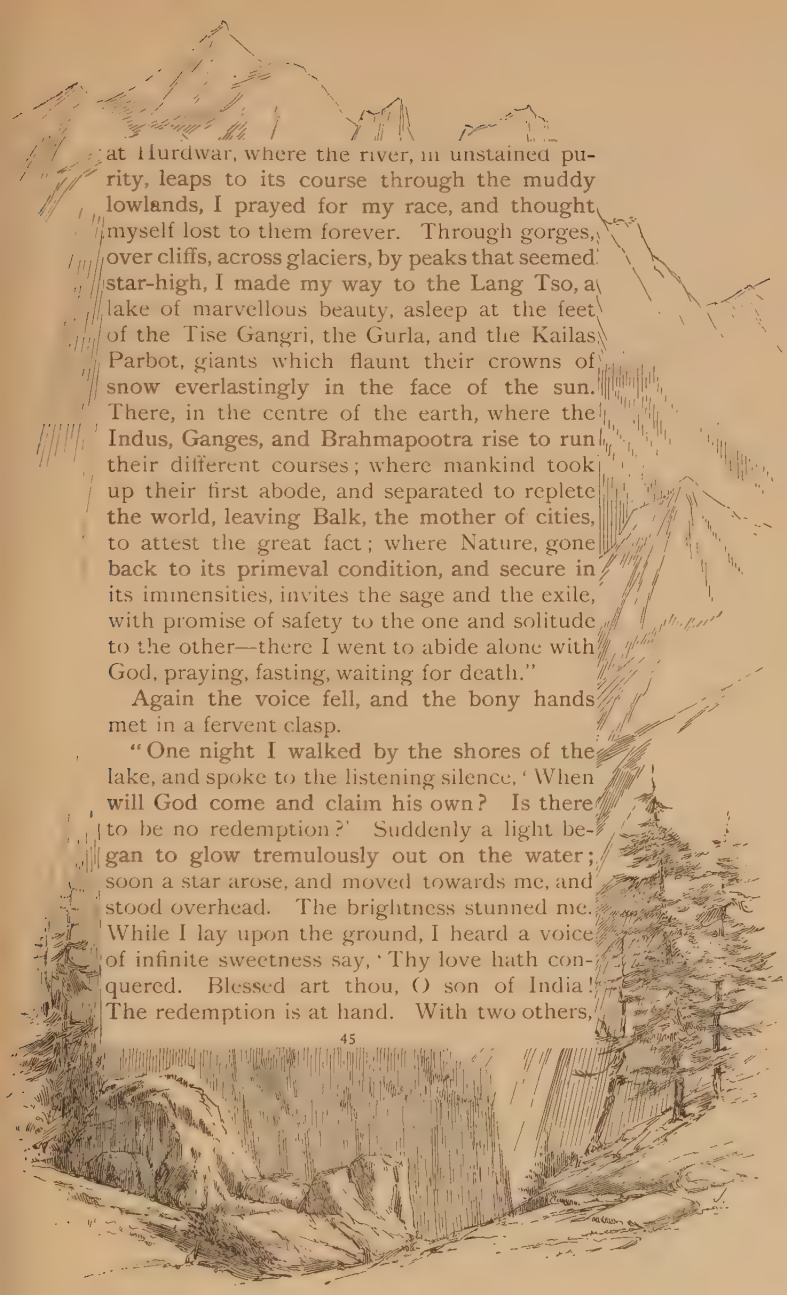
The shrunken face of the good man kindled visibly, and he clasped his hands with force. A silence ensued, during which the others looked at him, the Greek through tears. At length he resumed:

"The happiness of love is in action; its test



is what one is willing to do for others. I could not rest. Brahm had filled the world with so much wretchedness. The Sudra appealed to me; so did the countless devotees and victims. The island of Ganga Lagor lies where the sacred waters of the Ganges disappear in the Indian Ocean. Thither I betook myself. In the shade of the temple built there to the sage Kapila, in a union of prayers with the disciples whom the sanctified memory of the holy man keeps around his house, I thought to find rest. But twice every year came pilgrimages of Hindoos seeking the purification of the waters. Their misery strengthened my love. Against its impulse to speak I clenched my jaws; for one word against Brahm or the Triad or the Shastras would doom me; one act of kindness to the outcast Brahmans who now and then dragged themselves to die on the burning sands—a blessing said, a cup of water given—and I became one of them, lost to family, country, privileges, caste. The love conquered! I spoke to the disciples in the temple; they drove me out. I spoke to the pilgrims, they stoned me from the island. On the highways I attempted to preach; my hearers fled from me, or sought my life. In all India, finally, there was not a place in which I could find peace or safety—not even among the outcasts; for, though fallen, they were still believers in Brahm. In my extremity, I looked for a solitude in which to hide from all but God. I followed the Ganges to its source, far up in the Himalayas. When I entered the pass





at Hurdwar, where the river, in unstained purity, leaps to its course through the muddy lowlands, I prayed for my race, and thought myself lost to them forever. Through gorges, over cliffs, across glaciers, by peaks that seemed star-high, I made my way to the Lang Tso, a lake of marvellous beauty, asleep at the feet of the Tise Gangri, the Gurla, and the Kailas Parbot, giants which flaunt their crowns of snow everlastingly in the face of the sun. There, in the centre of the earth, where the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmapootra rise to run their different courses; where mankind took up their first abode, and separated to replete the world, leaving Balk, the mother of cities, to attest the great fact; where Nature, gone back to its primeval condition, and secure in its immensities, invites the sage and the exile, with promise of safety to the one and solitude to the other—there I went to abide alone with God, praying, fasting, waiting for death."

Again the voice fell, and the bony hands met in a fervent clasp.

"One night I walked by the shores of the lake, and spoke to the listening silence, 'When will God come and claim his own? Is there to be no redemption?' Suddenly a light began to glow tremulously out on the water; soon a star arose, and moved towards me, and stood overhead. The brightness stunned me. While I lay upon the ground, I heard a voice of infinite sweetness say, 'Thy love hath conquered. Blessed art thou, O son of India! The redemption is at hand. With two others,

from far quarters of the earth, thou shalt see the Redeemer, and be a witness that he hath come. In the morning arise, and go meet them; and put all thy trust in the Spirit which shall guide thee.'

"And from that time the light has stayed with me; so I knew it was the visible presence of the Spirit. In the morning I started to the world by the way I had come. In a cleft of the mountain I found a stone of vast worth, which I sold in Hurdwar. By Lahore, and Cabool, and Yezd, I came to Ispahan. There I bought the camel, and thence was led to Bagdad, not waiting for caravans. Alone I travelled, fearless, for the Spirit was with me, and is with me yet. What glory is ours, O brethren! We are to see the Redeemer—to speak to him—to worship him? I am done."

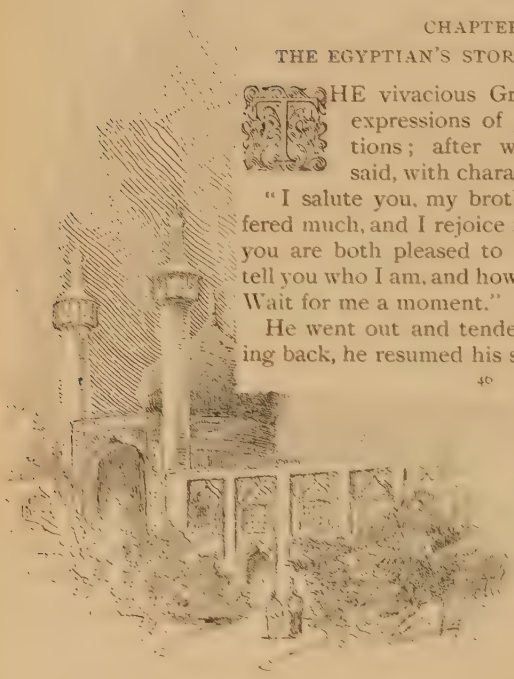
CHAPTER V

THE EGYPTIAN'S STORY—GOOD WORKS

THE vivacious Greek broke forth in expressions of joy and congratulations; after which the Egyptian said, with characteristic gravity:

"I salute you, my brother. You have suffered much, and I rejoice in your triumph. If you are both pleased to hear me, I will now tell you who I am, and how I came to be called. Wait for me a moment."

He went out and tended the camels; coming back, he resumed his seat.



"Your words, brethren, were of the Spirit," he said, in commencement; "and the Spirit gives me to understand them. You each spoke particularly of your countries; in that there was a great object, which I will explain; but to make the interpretation complete, let me first speak of myself and my people. I am Balthasar the Egyptian."

The last words were spoken quietly, but with so much dignity that both listeners bowed to the speaker.

"There are many distinctions I might claim for my race," he contined; "but I will content myself with one. History began with us. We were the first to perpetuate events by records kept. So we have no traditions; and instead of poetry, we offer you certainty. On the façades of palaces and temples, on obelisks, on the inner walls of tombs, we wrote the names of our kings, and what they did; and to the delicate papyri we intrusted the wisdom of our philosophers and the secrets of our religion—all the secrets but one, whereof I will presently speak. Older than the Vedas of Para-Brahm or the Up-Angas of Vyasa, O Melchior; older than the songs of Homer or the metaphysics of Plato, O my Gaspar; older than the sacred books or kings of the people of China, or those of Siddârtha, son of the beautiful Maya; older than the Genesis of Moschè the Hebrew—oldest of human records are the writings of Meñes, our first king." Pausing an instant, he fixed his large eyes kindly upon the Greek, saying, "In the youth of Hel-

las, who, O Gaspar, were the teachers of her teachers?"

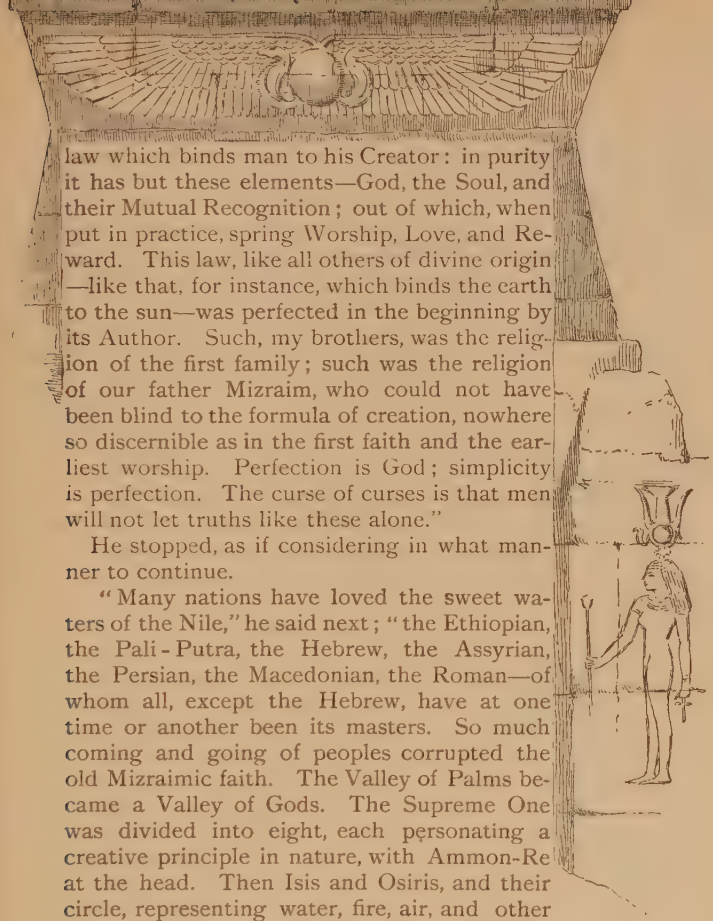
The Greek bowed, smiling.

"By those records," Balthasar continued, "we know that when the fathers came from the far East, from the region of the birth of the three sacred rivers, from the centre of the earth — the Old Iran of which you spoke, O Melchior—came bringing with them the history of the world before the Flood, and of the Flood itself, as given to the Aryans by the sons of Noah, they taught God, the Creator and the Beginning, and the Soul, deathless as God. When the duty which calls us now is happily done, if you choose to go with me, I will show you the sacred library of our priesthood; among others, the Book of the Dead, in which is the ritual to be observed by the soul after Death has despatched it on its journey to judgment. The ideas — God and the Immortal Soul — were borne to Mizraim over the desert, and by him to the banks of the Nile. They were then in their purity, easy of understanding, as what God intends for our happiness always is; so, also, was the first worship—a song and a prayer natural to a soul joyous, hopeful, and in love with its Maker."

Here the Greek threw up his hands, exclaiming, "Oh! the light deepens within me!"

"And in me!" said the Hindoo, with equal fervor.

The Egyptian regarded them benignantly, then went on, saying, "Religion is merely the



law which binds man to his Creator: in purity it has but these elements—God, the Soul, and their Mutual Recognition; out of which, when put in practice, spring Worship, Love, and Reward. This law, like all others of divine origin—like that, for instance, which binds the earth to the sun—was perfected in the beginning by its Author. Such, my brothers, was the religion of the first family; such was the religion of our father Mizraim, who could not have been blind to the formula of creation, nowhere so discernible as in the first faith and the earliest worship. Perfection is God; simplicity is perfection. The curse of curses is that men will not let truths like these alone."

He stopped, as if considering in what manner to continue.

"Many nations have loved the sweet waters of the Nile," he said next; "the Ethiopian, the Pali-Putra, the Hebrew, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman—of whom all, except the Hebrew, have at one time or another been its masters. So much coming and going of peoples corrupted the old Mizraimic faith. The Valley of Palms became a Valley of Gods. The Supreme One was divided into eight, each personating a creative principle in nature, with Ammon-Re at the head. Then Isis and Osiris, and their circle, representing water, fire, air, and other forces, were invented. Still the multiplication went on until we had another order, suggested by human qualities, such as strength, knowledge, love, and the like."

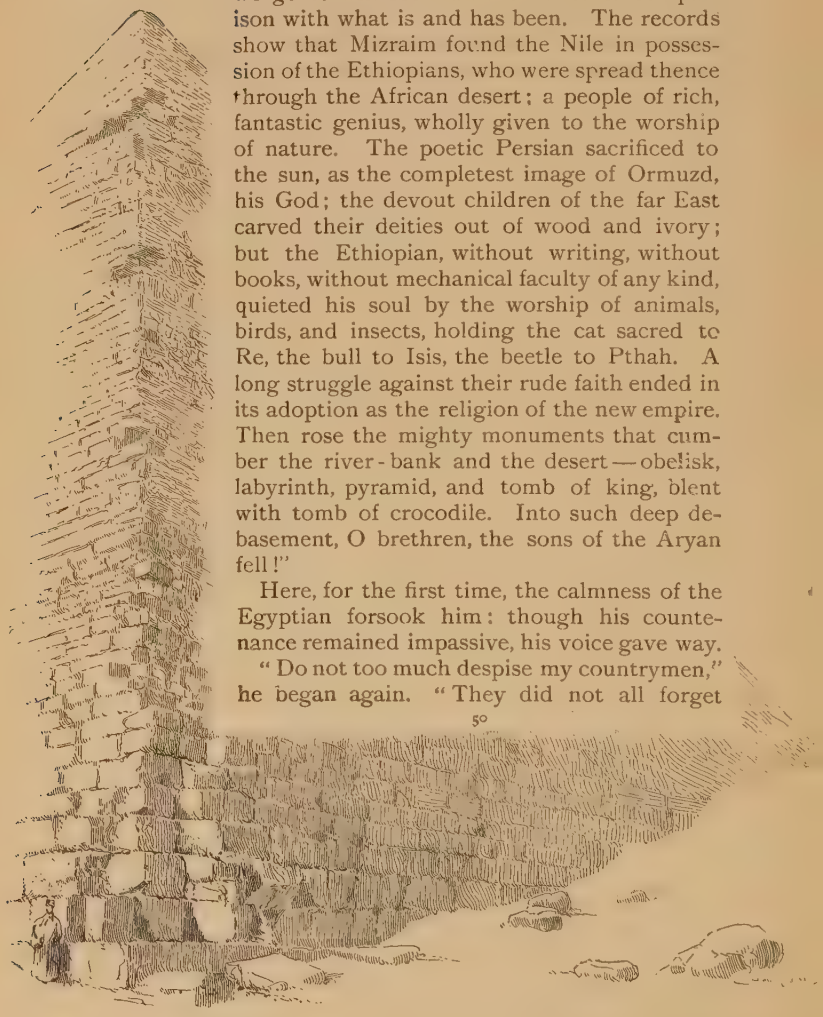
"In all which there was the old folly!" cried the Greek, impulsively. "Only the things out of reach remain as they came to us."

The Egyptian bowed, and proceeded:

"Yet a little further, O my brethren, a little further, before I come to myself. What we go to will seem all the holier of comparison with what is and has been. The records show that Mizraim found the Nile in possession of the Ethiopians, who were spread thence through the African desert; a people of rich, fantastic genius, wholly given to the worship of nature. The poetic Persian sacrificed to the sun, as the completest image of Ormuzd, his God; the devout children of the far East carved their deities out of wood and ivory; but the Ethiopian, without writing, without books, without mechanical faculty of any kind, quieted his soul by the worship of animals, birds, and insects, holding the cat sacred to Re, the bull to Isis, the beetle to Pthah. A long struggle against their rude faith ended in its adoption as the religion of the new empire. Then rose the mighty monuments that cumber the river-bank and the desert — obelisk, labyrinth, pyramid, and tomb of king, blent with tomb of crocodile. Into such deep debasement, O brethren, the sons of the Aryan fell!"

Here, for the first time, the calmness of the Egyptian forsook him: though his countenance remained impassive, his voice gave way.

"Do not too much despise my countrymen," he began again. "They did not all forget



God. I said awhile ago, you may remember, that to papyri we intrusted all the secrets of our religion except one; of that I will now tell you. We had as king once a certain Pharaoh, who lent himself to all manner of changes and additions. To establish the new system, he strove to drive the old entirely out of mind. The Hebrews then dwelt with us as slaves. They clung to their God; and when the persecution became intolerable, they were delivered in a manner never to be forgotten. I speak from the records now. Mosché, himself a Hebrew, came to the palace, and demanded permission for the slaves, then millions in number, to leave the country. The demand was in the name of the Lord God of Israel. Pharaoh refused. Hear what followed. First, all the water, that in the lakes and rivers, like that in the wells and vessels, turned to blood. Yet the monarch refused. Then frogs came up and covered all the land. Still he was firm. Then Mosché threw ashes in the air, and a plague attacked the Egyptians. Next, all the cattle, except of the Hebrews, were struck dead. Locusts devoured the green things of the valley. At noon the day was turned into a darkness so thick that lamps would not burn. Finally, in the night all the first-born of the Egyptians died; not even Pharaoh's escaped. Then he yielded. But when the Hebrews were gone he followed them with his army. At the last moment the sea was divided, so that the fugitives passed it dry-shod. When the pursuers drove in after

them, the waves rushed back and drowned horse, foot, charioteers, and king. You spoke of revelation, my Gaspar—"

The blue eyes of the Greek sparkled.

"I had the story from the Jew," he cried. "You confirm it, O Balthasar!"

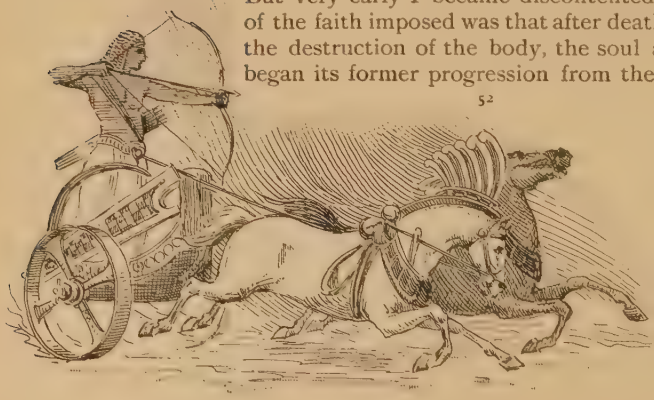
"Yes, but through me Egypt speaks, not Mosché. I interpret the marbles. The priests of that time wrote in their way what they witnessed, and the revelation has lived. So I come to the one unrecorded secret. In my country, brethren, we have, from the day of the unfortunate Pharaoh, always had two religions—one private, the other public; one of many gods, practised by the people; the other of one God, cherished only by the priesthood. Rejoice with me, O brothers! All the trampling by the many nations, all the harrowing by kings, all the inventions of enemies, all the changes of time, have been in vain. Like a seed under the mountains waiting its hour, the glorious Truth has lived; and this—this is its day!"

The wasted frame of the Hindoo trembled with delight, and the Greek cried aloud,

"It seems to me the very desert is singing."

From a gurglet of water near by the Egyptian took a draught, and proceeded:

"I was born at Alexandria, a prince and a priest, and had the education usual to my class. But very early I became discontented. Part of the faith imposed was that after death, upon the destruction of the body, the soul at once began its former progression from the lowest



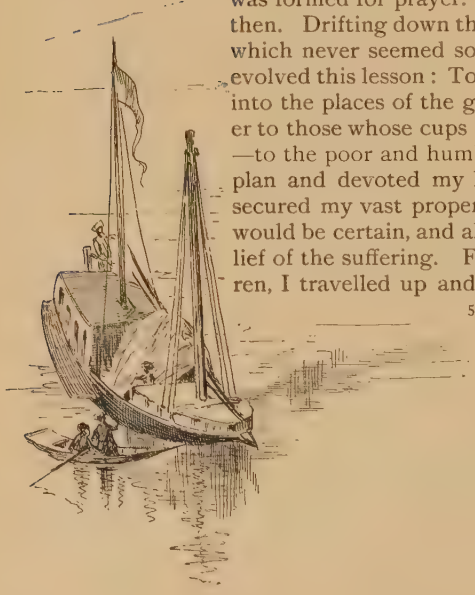
up to humanity, the highest and last existence; and that without reference to conduct in the mortal life. When I heard of the Persian's Realm of Light, his Paradise across the bridge Chinevat, where only the good go, the thought haunted me; insomuch that in the day, as in the night, I brooded over the comparative ideas Eternal Transmigration and Eternal Life in Heaven. If, as my teacher taught, God was just, why was there no distinction between the good and the bad? At length it became clear to me, a certainty, a corollary of the law to which I reduced pure religion, that death was only the point of separation at which the wicked are left or lost, and the faithful rise to a higher life; not the nirvana of Buddha, or the negative rest of Brahma, O Melchior; nor the better condition in hell, which is all of Heaven allowed by the Olympic faith, O Gaspar; but life—life active, joyous, everlasting—LIFE WITH GOD! The discovery led to another inquiry. Why should the Truth be longer kept a secret for the selfish solace of the priesthood? The reason for the suppression was gone. Philosophy had at least brought us toleration. In Egypt we had Rome instead of Rameses. One day, in the Brucheium, the most splendid and crowded quarter of Alexandria, I arose and preached. The East and West contributed to my audience. Students going to the Library, priests from the Serapeion, idlers from the Museum, patrons of the race-course, countrymen from the Rhacotis—a multitude—stopped to hear me. I preached

God, the Soul, Right and Wrong, and Heaven, the reward of a virtuous life. You, O Melchior, were stoned; my auditors first wondered, then laughed. I tried again; they pelted me with epigrams, covered my God with ridicule, and darkened my Heaven with mockery. Not to linger needlessly, I fell before them."

The Hindoo here drew a long sigh, as he said, "The enemy of man is man, my brother."

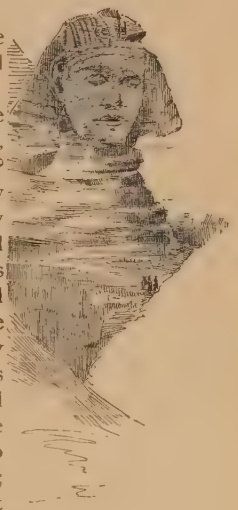
Balthasar lapsed into silence.

"I gave much thought to finding the cause of my failure, and at last succeeded," he said, upon beginning again. "Up the river, a day's journey from the city, there is a village of herdsmen and gardeners. I took a boat and went there. In the evening I called the people together, men and women, the poorest of the poor. I preached to them exactly as I had preached in the Brucheium. They did not laugh. Next evening I spoke again, and they believed and rejoiced, and carried the news abroad. At the third meeting a society was formed for prayer. I returned to the city then. Drifting down the river, under the stars, which never seemed so bright and so near, I evolved this lesson: To begin a reform, go not into the places of the great and rich; go rather to those whose cups of happiness are empty —to the poor and humble. And then I laid a plan and devoted my life. As a first step, I secured my vast property, so that the income would be certain, and always at call for the relief of the suffering. From that day, O brethren, I travelled up and down the Nile, in the

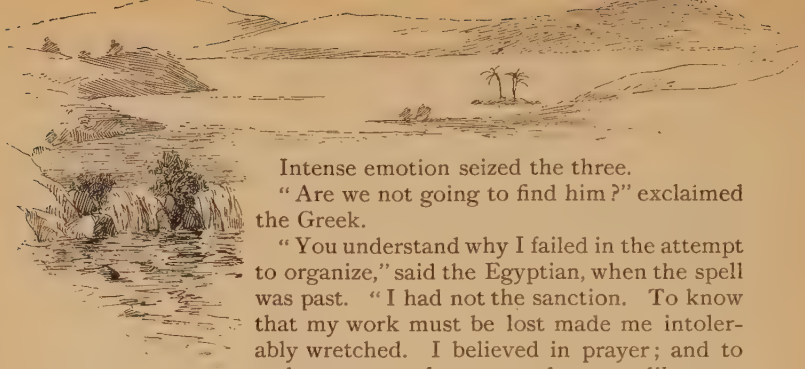


villages, and to all the tribes, preaching One God, a righteous life, and reward in Heaven. I have done good—it does not become me to say how much. I also know that part of the world to be ripe for the reception of Him we go to find.

A flush suffused the swarthy cheek of the speaker; but he overcame the feeling, and continued:



"The years so given, O my brothers, were troubled by one thought—When I was gone, what would become of the cause I had started? Was it to end with me? I had dreamed many times of organization as a fitting crown for my work. To hide nothing from you, I had tried to effect it, and failed. Brethren, the world is now in the condition that, to restore the old Mizraimic faith, the reformer must have a more than human sanction; he must not merely come in God's name, he must have the proofs subject to his word; he must demonstrate all he says, even God. So preoccupied is the mind with myths and systems; so much do false deities crowd every place—earth, air, sky; so have they become of everything a part, that return to the first religion can only be along bloody paths, through fields of persecution; that is to say, the converts must be willing to die rather than recant. And who in this age can carry the faith of men to such a point but God himself? To redeem the race—I do not mean to destroy it—to redeem the race, he must make himself once more manifest; HE MUST COME IN PERSON."



Intense emotion seized the three.

"Are we not going to find him?" exclaimed the Greek.

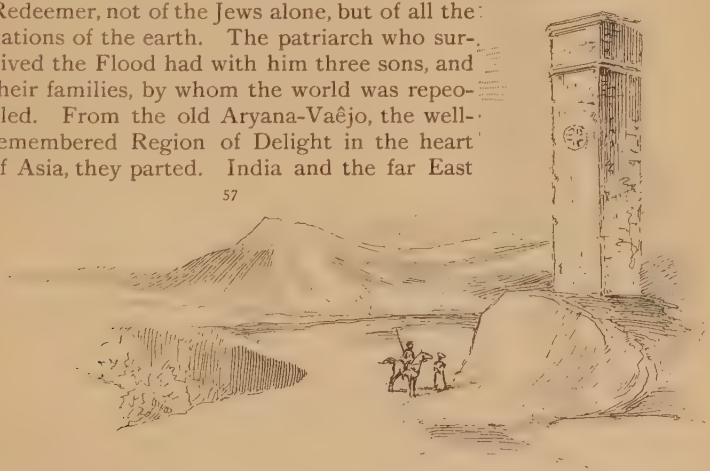
"You understand why I failed in the attempt to organize," said the Egyptian, when the spell was past. "I had not the sanction. To know that my work must be lost made me intolerably wretched. I believed in prayer; and to make my appeals pure and strong, like you, my brethren, I went out of the beaten ways, I went where man had not been, where only God was. Above the fifth cataract, above the meeting of rivers in Sennar, up the Bahr el Abiad, into the far unknown of Africa, I went. There, in the morning, a mountain blue as the sky flings a cooling shadow wide over the western desert, and, with its cascades of melted snow, feeds a broad lake nestling at its base on the east. The lake is the mother of the great river. For a year and more the mountain gave me a home. The fruit of the palm fed my body, prayer my spirit. One night I walked in the orchard close by the little sea. 'The world is dying. When wilt thou come? Why may I not see the redemption, O God?' So I prayed. The glassy water was sparkling with stars. One of them seemed to leave its place, and rise to the surface, where it became a brilliancy burning to the eyes. Then it moved towards me, and stood over my head, apparently in hand's reach. I fell down and hid my face. A voice, not of the earth, said, 'Thy good works have conquered. Blessed art thou, O son of Mizraim! The redemption cometh. With two

others, from the remotenesses of the world, thou shalt see the Saviour, and testify for him. In the morning arise, and go meet them. And when ye have all come to the holy city of Jerusalem, ask of the people, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are sent to worship him. Put all thy trust in the Spirit which will guide thee.'

"And the light became an inward illumination not to be doubted, and has stayed with me, a governor and a guide. It led me down the river to Memphis, where I made ready for the desert. I bought my camel, and came hither without rest, by way of Suez and Kufileh, and up through the lands of Moab and Ammon. God is with us, O my brethren!"

He paused, and thereupon, with a prompting not their own, they all arose, and looked at each other.

"I said there was a purpose in the particularity with which we described our peoples and their histories," so the Egyptian proceeded. "He we go to find was called 'King of the Jews;' by that name we are bidden to ask for him. But, now that we have met, and heard from each other, we may know him to be the Redeemer, not of the Jews alone, but of all the nations of the earth. The patriarch who survived the Flood had with him three sons, and their families, by whom the world was repeopled. From the old Aryana-Vaêjo, the well-remembered Region of Delight in the heart of Asia, they parted. India and the far East



received the children of the first; the descendants of the youngest, through the North, streamed into Europe; those of the second overflowed the deserts about the Red Sea, passing into Africa; and though most of the latter are yet dwellers in shifting tents, some of them became builders along the Nile."

By a simultaneous impulse the three joined hands.

"Could anything be more divinely ordered?" Balthasar continued. "When we have found the Lord, the brothers, and all the generations that have succeeded them, will kneel to him in homage with us. And when we part to go our separate ways, the world will have learned a new lesson—that Heaven may be won, not by the sword, not by human wisdom, but by Faith, Love, and Good Works."

There was silence, broken by sighs and sanctified with tears; for the joy that filled them might not be stayed. It was the unspeakable joy of souls on the shores of the River of Life, resting with the Redeemed in God's presence.

Presently their hands fell apart, and together they went out of the tent. The desert was still as the sky. The sun was sinking fast. The camels slept.

A little while after, the tent was struck, and, with the remains of the repast, restored to the cot; then the friends mounted, and set out single file, led by the Egyptian. Their course was due west, into the chilly night. The camels swung forward in steady trot, keeping the line and the intervals so exactly that those

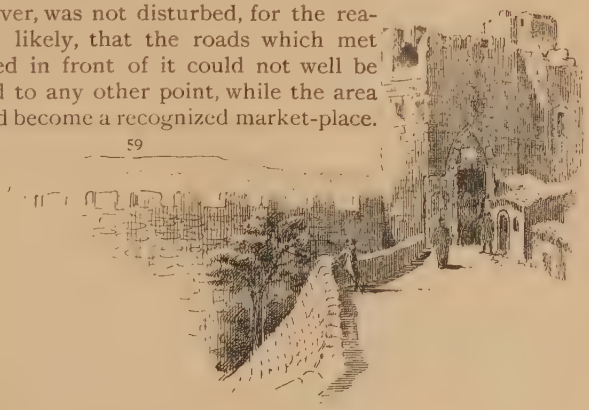
following seemed to tread in the tracks of the leader. The riders spoke not once.

By-and-by the moon came up. And as the three tall white figures sped, with soundless tread, through the opalescent light, they appeared like spectres flying from hateful shadows. Suddenly, in the air before them, not farther up than a low hill-top, flared a lambent flame; as they looked at it, the apparition contracted into a focus of dazzling lustre. Their hearts beat fast; their souls thrilled; and they shouted as with one voice, "The Star! the Star! God is with us!"

CHAPTER VI

THE JOPPA GATE

UPON an aperture of the western wall of Jerusalem hang the "oaken valves" called the Bethlehem or Joppa Gate. The area outside of them is one of the notable places of the city. Long before David coveted Zion there was a citadel there. When at last the son of Jesse ousted the Jebusite, and began to build, the site of the citadel became the north-west corner of the new wall, defended by a tower much more imposing than the old one. The location of the gate, however, was not disturbed, for the reasons, most likely, that the roads which met and merged in front of it could not well be transferred to any other point, while the area outside had become a recognized market-place.



In Solomon's day there was great traffic at the locality, shared in by traders from Egypt and the rich dealers from Tyre and Sidon. Nearly three thousand years have passed, and yet a kind of commerce clings to the spot. A pilgrim wanting a pin or a pistol, a cucumber or a camel, a house or a horse, a loan or a lentil, a date or a dragoman, a melon or a man, a dove or a donkey, has only to inquire for the article at the Joppa Gate. Sometimes the scene is quite animated, and then it suggests, What a place the old market must have been in the days of Herod the Builder! And to that period and that market the reader is now to be transferred.

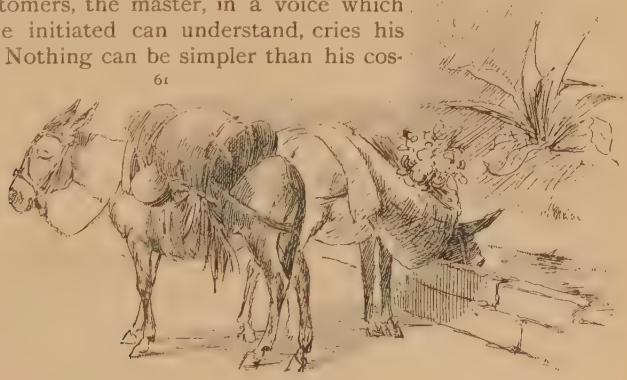
Following the Hebrew system, the meeting of the wise men described in the preceding chapters took place in the afternoon of the twenty-fifth day of the third month of the year; that is to say, on the twenty-fifth day of December. The year was the second of the 193d Olympiad, or the 747th of Rome; the sixty-seventh of Herod the Great, and the thirty-fifth of his reign; the fourth before the beginning of the Christian era. The hours of the day, by Judean custom, begin with the sun, the first hour being the first after sunrise; so, to be precise, the market at the Joppa Gate during the first hour of the day stated was in full session, and very lively. The massive valves had been wide open since dawn. Business, always aggressive, had pushed through the arched entrance into a narrow lane and court, which, passing by the walls of the great

tower, conducted on into the city. As Jerusalem is in the hill country, the morning air on this occasion was not a little crisp. The rays of the sun, with their promise of warmth, lingered provokingly far up on the battlements and turrets of the great piles about, down from which fell the crooning of pigeons and the whir of the flocks coming and going.

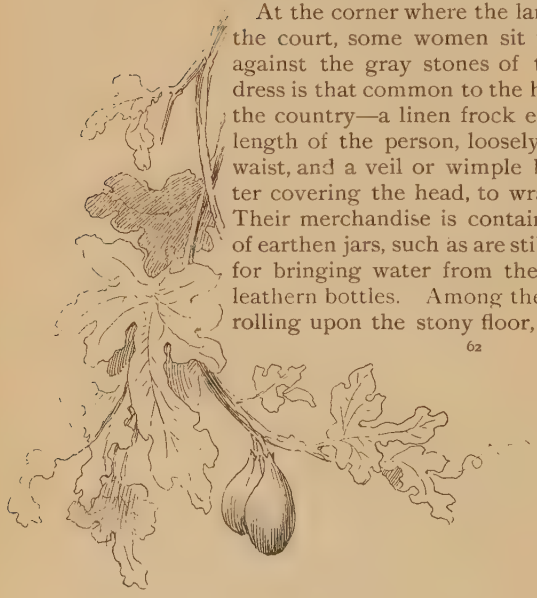
As a passing acquaintance with the people of the Holy City, strangers as well as residents, will be necessary to an understanding of some of the pages which follow, it will be well to stop at the gate and pass the scene in review. Better opportunity will not offer to get sight of the populace who will after a while go forward in a mood very different from that which now possesses them.

The scene is at first one of utter confusion — confusion of action, sounds, colors, and things. It is especially so in the lane and court. The ground there is paved with broad unshaped flags, from which each cry and jar and hoof-stamp arises to swell the medley that rings and roars up between the solid impending walls. A little mixing with the throng, however, a little familiarity with the business going on, will make analysis possible.

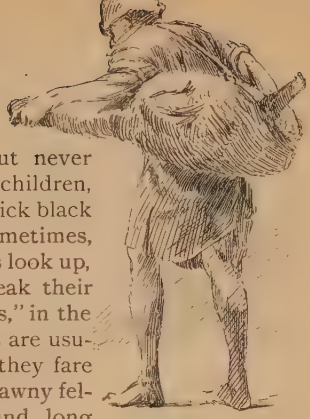
Here stands a donkey, dozing under panniers full of lentils, beans, onions, and cucumbers, brought fresh from the gardens and terraces of Galilee. When not engaged in serving customers, the master, in a voice which only the initiated can understand, cries his stock. Nothing can be simpler than his cos-



tume — sandals, and an unbleached, undyed blanket, crossed over one shoulder and girt round the waist. Near-by, and far more imposing and grotesque, though scarcely as patient as the donkey, kneels a camel, raw-boned, rough, and gray, with long shaggy tufts of fox-colored hair under its throat, neck, and body, and a load of boxes and baskets curiously arranged upon an enormous saddle. The owner is an Egyptian, small, lithe, and of a complexion which has borrowed a good deal from the dust of the roads and the sands of the desert. He wears a faded tarbooshe, a loose gown, sleeveless, unbelted, and dropping from the neck to the knee. His feet are bare. The camel, restless under the load, groans and occasionally shows his teeth; but the man paces indifferently to and fro, holding the driving-strap, and all the time advertising his fruits fresh from the orchards of the Kedron—grapes, dates, figs, apples, and pomegranates.



At the corner where the lane opens out into the court, some women sit with their backs against the gray stones of the wall. Their dress is that common to the humbler classes of the country—a linen frock extending the full length of the person, loosely gathered at the waist, and a veil or wimple broad enough, after covering the head, to wrap the shoulders. Their merchandise is contained in a number of earthen jars, such as are still used in the East for bringing water from the wells, and some leathern bottles. Among the jars and bottles, rolling upon the stony floor, regardless of the



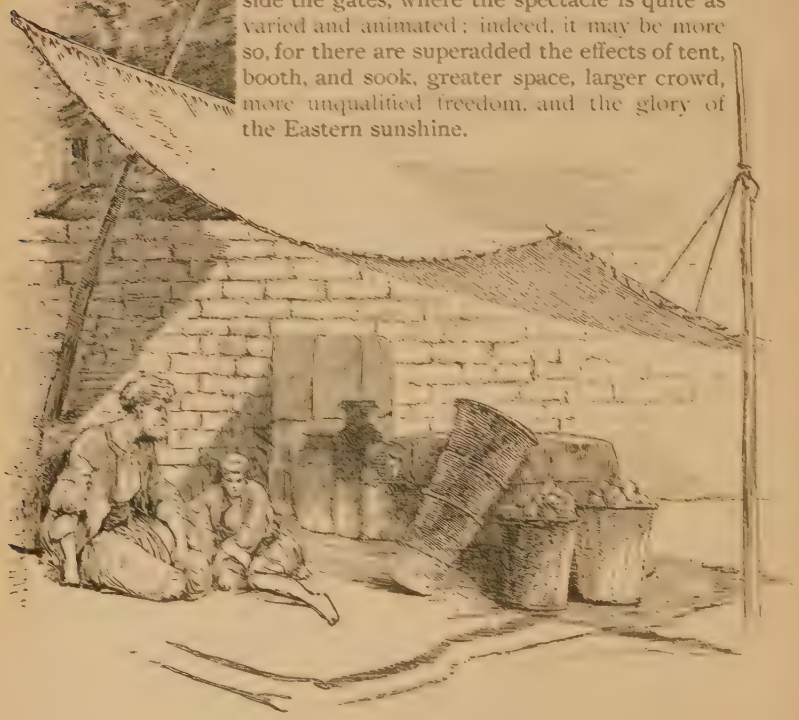
crowd and cold, often in danger but never hurt, play half a dozen half-naked children, their brown bodies, jetty eyes, and thick black hair attesting the blood of Israel. Sometimes, from under the wimples, the mothers look up, and in the vernacular modestly bespeak their trade: in the bottles "honey of grapes," in the jars "strong drink." Their entreaties are usually lost in the general uproar, and they fare illy against the many competitors: brawny fellows with bare legs, dirty tunics, and long beards, going about with bottles lashed to their backs, and shouting "Honey of wine! Grapes of En-Gedi!" When a customer halts one of them, round comes the bottle, and, upon lifting the thumb from the nozzle, out into the ready cup gushes the deep-red blood of the luscious berry.

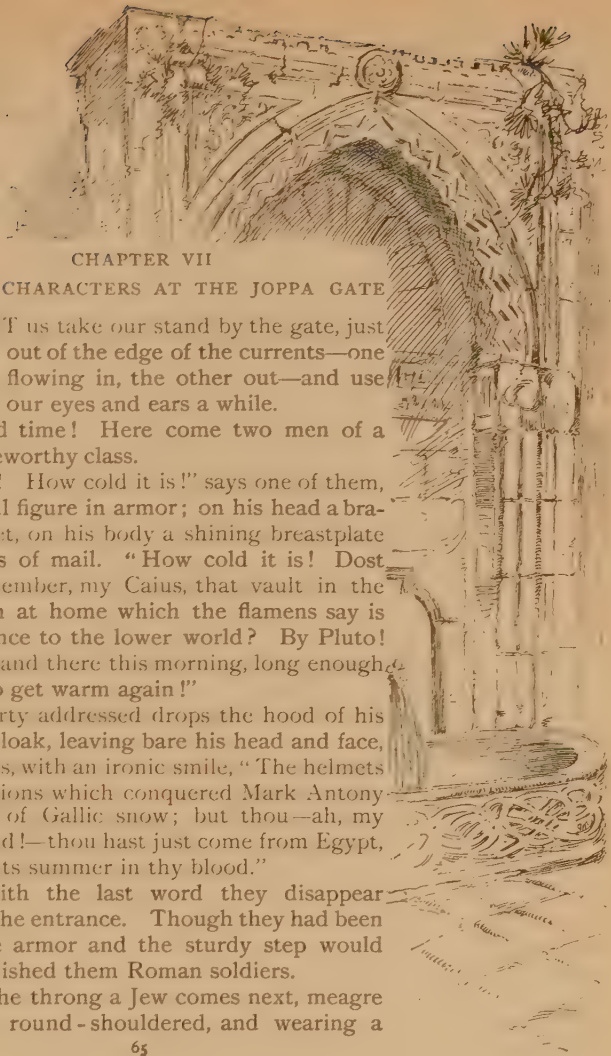
Scarcely less blatant are the dealers in birds —doves, ducks, and frequently the singing bulbul, or nightingale, most frequently pigeons; and buyers, receiving them from the nets, seldom fail to think of the perilous life of the catchers, bold climbers of the cliffs; now hanging with hand and foot to the face of the crag, now swinging in a basket far down the mountain fissure.

Blent with peddlers of jewelry—sharp men cloaked in scarlet and blue, top-heavy under prodigious white turbans, and fully conscious of the power there is in the lustre of a ribbon and the incisive gleam of gold, whether in bracelet or necklace, or in rings for the finger or the nose—and with peddlers of household

utensils, and with dealers in wearing-apparel, and with retailers of unguents for anointing the person, and with hucksters of all articles, fanciful as well as of need, hither and thither, tugging at halters and ropes, now screaming, now coaxing, toil the venders of animals—donkeys, horses, calves, sheep, bleating kids, and awkward camels; animals of every kind except the outlawed swine. All these are there; not singly, as described, but many times repeated; not in one place, but everywhere in the market.

Turning from this scene in the lane and court, this glance at the sellers and their commodities, the reader has need to give attention, in the next place, to visitors and buyers, for which the best studies will be found outside the gates, where the spectacle is quite as varied and animated; indeed, it may be more so, for there are superadded the effects of tent, booth, and sook, greater space, larger crowd, more unqualified freedom, and the glory of the Eastern sunshine.





CHAPTER VII

TYPICAL CHARACTERS AT THE JOPPA GATE

LET us take our stand by the gate, just out of the edge of the currents—one flowing in, the other out—and use our eyes and ears a while.

In good time! Here come two men of a most noteworthy class.

"Gods! How cold it is!" says one of them, a powerful figure in armor; on his head a brazen helmet, on his body a shining breastplate and skirts of mail. "How cold it is! Dost thou remember, my Caius, that vault in the Comitium at home which the flamens say is the entrance to the lower world? By Pluto! I could stand there this morning, long enough at least to get warm again!"

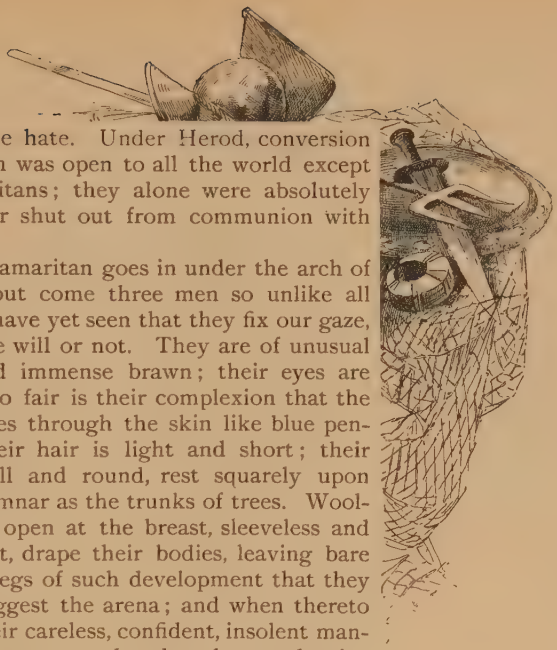
The party addressed drops the hood of his military cloak, leaving bare his head and face, and replies, with an ironic smile, "The helmets of the legions which conquered Mark Antony were full of Gallic snow; but thou—ah, my poor friend!—thou hast just come from Egypt, bringing its summer in thy blood."

And with the last word they disappear through the entrance. Though they had been silent, the armor and the sturdy step would have published them Roman soldiers.

From the throng a Jew comes next, meagre of frame, round-shouldered, and wearing a

coarse brown robe; over his eyes and face, and down his back hangs a mat of long uncombed hair. He is alone. Those who meet him laugh, if they do not worse; for he is a Nazarite, one of a despised sect which rejects the books of Moses, devotes itself to abhorred vows, and goes unshorn while the vows endure.

As we watch his retiring figure, suddenly there is a commotion in the crowd, a parting quickly to the right and left, with exclamations sharp and decisive. Then the cause comes—a man, Hebrew in feature and dress. The mantle of snow-white linen, held to his head by cords of yellow silk, flows free over his shoulders; his robe is richly embroidered; a red sash with fringes of gold wraps his waist several times. His demeanor is calm; he even smiles upon those who, with such rude haste, make room for him. A leper? No, he is only a Samaritan. The shrinking crowd, if asked, would say he is a mongrel—an Assyrian—whose touch of the robe is pollution; from whom, consequently, an Israelite, though dying, might not accept life. In fact, the feud is not of blood. When David set his throne here on Mount Zion, with only Judah to support him, the ten tribes betook themselves to Shechem, a city much older, and, at that date, infinitely richer in holy memories. The final union of the tribes did not settle the dispute thus begun. The Samaritans clung to their tabernacle on Gerizim, and, while maintaining its superior sanctity, laughed at the irate doctors in Jerusalem. Time brought no assuage-



ment of the hate. Under Herod, conversion to the faith was open to all the world except the Samaritans; they alone were absolutely and forever shut out from communion with Jews.

As the Samaritan goes in under the arch of the gate, out come three men so unlike all whom we have yet seen that they fix our gaze, whether we will or not. They are of unusual stature and immense brawn; their eyes are blue, and so fair is their complexion that the blood shines through the skin like blue pencilling; their hair is light and short; their heads, small and round, rest squarely upon necks columnar as the trunks of trees. Woollen tunics, open at the breast, sleeveless and loosely girt, drape their bodies, leaving bare arms and legs of such development that they at once suggest the arena; and when thereto we add their careless, confident, insolent manner, we cease to wonder that the people give them way, and stop after they have passed to look at them again. They are gladiators—wrestlers, runners, boxers, swordsmen; professionals unknown in Judea before the coming of the Roman; fellows who, what time they are not in training, may be seen strolling through the king's gardens or sitting with the guards at the palace gates; or possibly they are visitors from Cæsarea, Sebaste, or Jericho; in which Herod, more Greek than Jew, and with all a Roman's love of games and bloody spectacles, has built vast theatres, and now keeps schools of fighting-men, drawn, as is the

custom, from the Gallic provinces or the Slavic tribes on the Danube.

"By Bacchus!" says one of them, drawing his clinched hand to his shoulder, "their skulls are not thicker than egg-shells."

The brutal look which goes with the gesture disgusts us, and we turn happily to something more pleasant.

Opposite us is a fruit-stand. The proprietor has a bald head, a long face, and a nose like the beak of a hawk. He sits upon a carpet spread upon the dust; the wall is at his back; overhead hangs a scant curtain; around him, within hand's reach, and arranged upon little stools, lie osier boxes full of almonds, grapes, figs, and pomegranates. To him now comes one at whom we cannot help looking, though for another reason than that which fixed our eyes upon the gladiators: he is really beautiful—a beautiful Greek. Around his temples, holding the waving hair, is a crown of myrtle, to which still cling the pale flowers and half-ripe berries. His tunic, scarlet in color, is of the softest woollen fabric; below the girdle of buff leather, which is clasped in front by a fantastic device of shining gold, the skirt drops to the knee in folds heavy with embroidery of the same royal metal; a scarf, also woollen, and of mixed white and yellow, crosses his throat and falls trailing at his back; his arms and legs, where exposed, are white as ivory, and of the polish impossible except by perfect treatment with bath, oil, brushes, and pincers.

The dealer, keeping his seat, bends forward,

and throws his hands up until they meet in front of him, palm downward and fingers extended.

"What hast thou, this morning, O son of Paphos?" says the young Greek, looking at the boxes rather than at the Cypriote. "I am hungry. What hast thou for breakfast?"

"Fruits from the Pedius—genuine—such as the singers of Antioch take of mornings to restore the waste of their voices," the dealer answers, in a querulous nasal tone.

"A fig, but not one of thy best, for the singers of Antioch!" says the Greek. "Thou art a worshipper of Aphrodite, and so am I, as the myrtle I wear proves; therefore I tell thee their voices have the chill of a Caspian wind. Seest thou this girdle?—a gift of the mighty Salome—"

"The king's sister!" exclaims the Cypriote, with another salaam.

"And of royal taste and divine judgment. And why not? She is more Greek than the king. But—my breakfast! Here is thy money—red coppers of Cyprus. Give me grapes, and—"

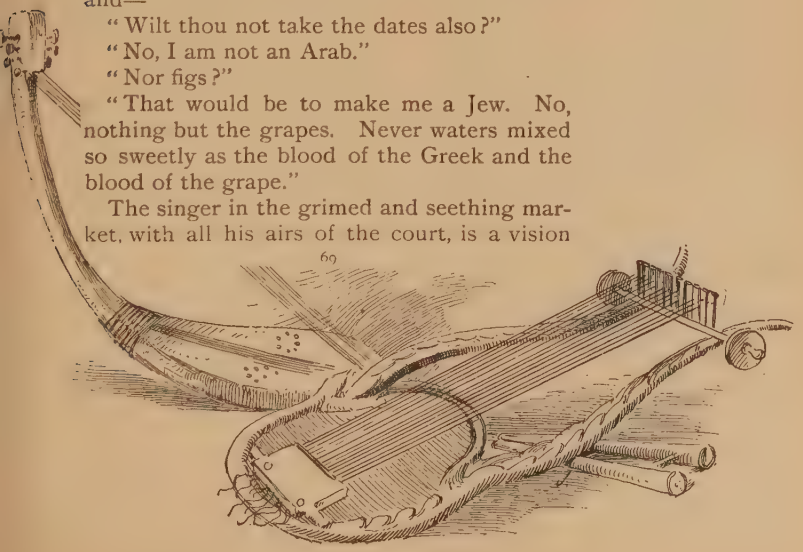
"Wilt thou not take the dates also?"

"No, I am not an Arab."

"Nor figs?"

"That would be to make me a Jew. No, nothing but the grapes. Never waters mixed so sweetly as the blood of the Greek and the blood of the grape."

The singer in the grimed and seething market, with all his airs of the court, is a vision

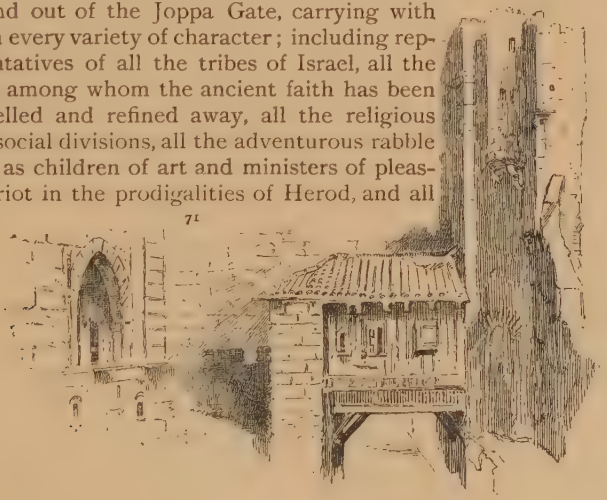


not easily shut out of mind by such as see him; as if for the purpose, however, a person follows him challenging all our wonder. He comes up the road slowly, his face towards the ground; at intervals he stops, crosses his hands upon his breast, lengthens his countenance, and turns his eyes towards heaven, as if about to break into prayer. Nowhere, except in Jerusalem, can such a character be found. On his forehead, attached to the band which keeps the mantle in place, projects a leathern case, square in form; another similar case is tied by a thong to the left arm; the borders of his robe are decorated with deep fringe; and by such signs—the phylacteries, the enlarged borders of the garment, and the savor of intense holiness pervading the whole man—we know him to be a Pharisee, one of an organization (in religion a sect, in politics a party) whose bigotry and power will shortly bring the world to grief.

The densest of the throng outside the gate covers the road leading off to Joppa. Turning from the Pharisee, we are attracted by some parties who, as subjects of study, opportunely separate themselves from the motley crowd. First among them a man of very noble appearance — clear, healthful complexion; bright black eyes; beard long and flowing, and rich with unguents; apparel well-fitting, costly, and suitable for the season. He carries a staff, and wears, suspended by a cord from his neck, a large golden seal. Several servants attend him, some of them with short swords

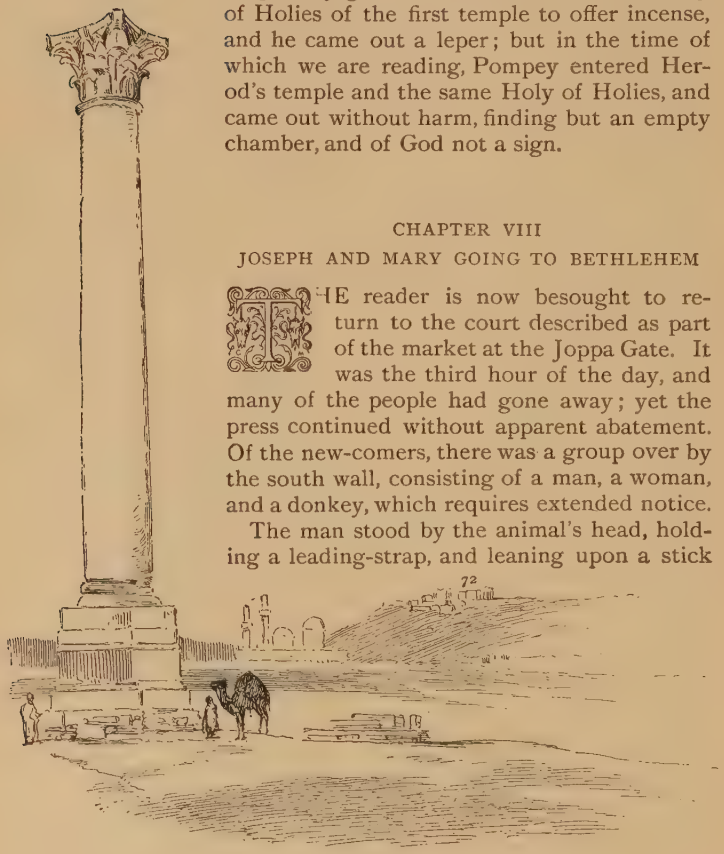
stuck through their sashes; when they address him, it is with the utmost deference. The rest of the party consists of two Arabs of the pure desert stock; thin, wiry men, deeply bronzed, and with hollow cheeks, and eyes of almost evil brightness; on their heads red tarbooshes; over their abas, and wrapping the left shoulder and the body so as to leave the right arm free, brown woollen haicks, or blankets. There is loud chaffering; for the Arabs are leading horses and trying to sell them; and in their eagerness they speak in high, shrill voices. The courtly person leaves the talking mostly to his servants; occasionally he answers with much dignity; directly, seeing the Cypriote, he stops and buys some figs. And when the whole party has passed the portal, close after the Pharisee, if we betake ourselves to the dealer in fruits, he will tell, with a wonderful salaam, that the stranger is a Jew, one of the princes of the city, who has travelled, and learned the difference between the common grapes of Syria and those of Cyprus, so surpassingly rich with the dews of the sea.

And so, till towards noon, sometimes later, the steady currents of business habitually flow in and out of the Joppa Gate, carrying with them every variety of character; including representatives of all the tribes of Israel, all the sects among whom the ancient faith has been parcelled and refined away, all the religious and social divisions, all the adventurous rabble who, as children of art and ministers of pleasure, riot in the prodigalities of Herod, and all



the peoples of note at any time compassed by the Cæsars and their predecessors, especially those dwelling within the circuit of the Mediterranean.

In other words, Jerusalem, rich in sacred history, richer in connection with sacred prophecies — the Jerusalem of Solomon, in which silver was as stones, and cedars as the sycamores of the vale—had come to be but a copy of Rome, a centre of unholy practices, a seat of pagan power. A Jewish king one day put on priestly garments, and went into the Holy of Holies of the first temple to offer incense, and he came out a leper; but in the time of which we are reading, Pompey entered Herod's temple and the same Holy of Holies, and came out without harm, finding but an empty chamber, and of God not a sign.



CHAPTER VIII

JOSEPH AND MARY GOING TO BETHLEHEM

THE reader is now besought to return to the court described as part of the market at the Joppa Gate. It was the third hour of the day, and many of the people had gone away; yet the press continued without apparent abatement. Of the new-comers, there was a group over by the south wall, consisting of a man, a woman, and a donkey, which requires extended notice.

The man stood by the animal's head, holding a leading-strap, and leaning upon a stick

which seemed to have been chosen for the double purpose of goad and staff. His dress was like that of the ordinary Jews around him, except that it had an appearance of newness. The mantle dropping from his head, and the robe or frock which clothed his person from neck to heel, were probably the garments he was accustomed to wear to the synagogue on Sabbath days. His features were exposed, and they told of fifty years of life, a surmise confirmed by the gray that streaked his otherwise black beard. He looked around him with the half-curious, half-vacant stare of a stranger and provincial.

The donkey ate leisurely from an armful of green grass, of which there was an abundance in the market. In its sleepy content, the brute did not admit of disturbance from the bustle and clamor about; no more was it mindful of the woman sitting upon its back in a cushioned pillion. An outer robe of dull woollen stuff completely covered her person, while a white wimple veiled her head and neck. Once in a while, impelled by curiosity to see or hear something passing, she drew the wimple aside, but so slightly that the face remained invisible.

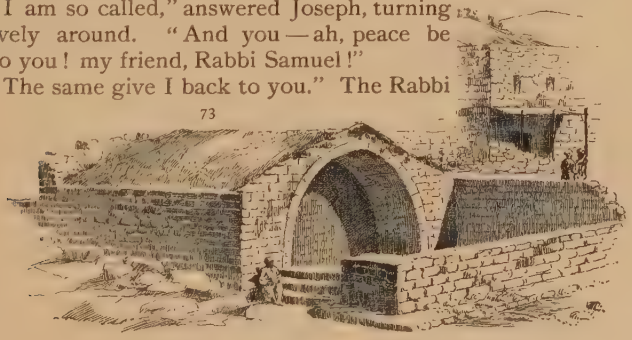
At length the man was accosted.

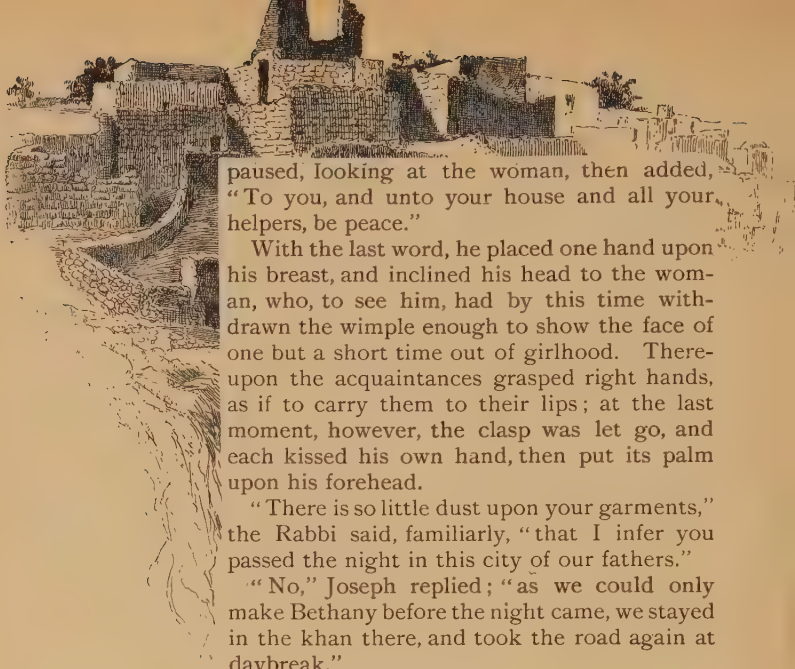
"Are you not Joseph of Nazareth?"

The speaker was standing close by.

"I am so called," answered Joseph, turning gravely around. "And you — ah, peace be unto you! my friend, Rabbi Samuel!"

"The same give I back to you." The Rabbi





paused, looking at the woman, then added, "To you, and unto your house and all your helpers, be peace."

With the last word, he placed one hand upon his breast, and inclined his head to the woman, who, to see him, had by this time withdrawn the wimple enough to show the face of one but a short time out of girlhood. Thereupon the acquaintances grasped right hands, as if to carry them to their lips; at the last moment, however, the clasp was let go, and each kissed his own hand, then put its palm upon his forehead.

"There is so little dust upon your garments," the Rabbi said, familiarly, "that I infer you passed the night in this city of our fathers."

"No," Joseph replied; "as we could only make Bethany before the night came, we stayed in the khan there, and took the road again at daybreak."

"The journey before you is long, then—not to Joppa, I hope."

"Only to Bethlehem."

The countenance of the Rabbi, theretofore open and friendly, became lowering and sinister, and he cleared his throat with a growl instead of a cough.

"Yes, yes—I see," he said. "You were born in Bethlehem, and wend thither now, with your daughter, to be counted for taxation, as ordered by Cæsar. The children of Jacob are as the tribes in Egypt were—only they have neither a Moses nor a Joshua. How are the mighty fallen!"

Joseph answered, without change of posture or countenance,

"The woman is not my daughter."

But the Rabbi clung to the political idea; and he went on, without noticing the explanation, "What are the Zealots doing down in Galilee?"

"I am a carpenter, and Nazareth is a village," said Joseph, cautiously. "The street on which my bench stands is not a road leading to any city. Hewing wood and sawing plank leave me no time to take part in the disputes of parties."

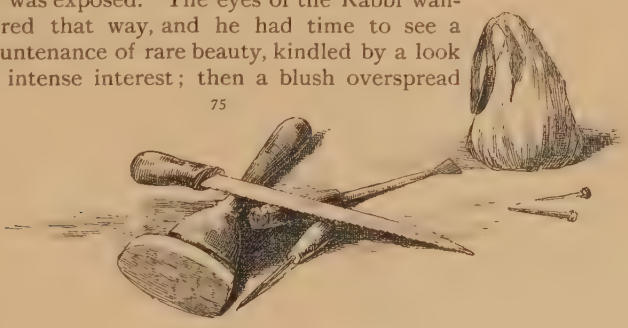
"But you are a Jew," said the Rabbi, earnestly. "You are a Jew, and of the line of David. It is not possible you can find pleasure in the payment of any tax except the shekel given by ancient custom to Jehovah."

Joseph held his peace.

"I do not complain," his friend continued, "of the amount of the tax—a denarius is a trifle. Oh no! The imposition of the tax is the offence. And, besides, what is paying it but submission to tyranny? Tell me, is it true that Judas claims to be the Messiah? You live in the midst of his followers."

"I have heard his followers say he was the Messiah," Joseph replied.

At this point the wimple was drawn aside, and for an instant the whole face of the woman was exposed. The eyes of the Rabbi wandered that way, and he had time to see a countenance of rare beauty, kindled by a look of intense interest; then a blush overspread



her cheeks and brow, and the veil was returned to its place.

The politician forgot his subject.

"Your daughter is comely," he said, speaking lower.

"She is not my daughter," Joseph repeated.

The curiosity of the Rabbi was aroused; seeing which, the Nazarene hastened to say further, "She is the child of Joachim and Anna of Bethlehem, of whom you have at least heard; for they were of great repute—"

"Yes," remarked the Rabbi, deferentially, "I know them. They were lineally descended from David. I knew them well."

"Well, they are dead now," the Nazarene proceeded. "They died in Nazareth. Joachim was not rich, yet he left a house and garden to be divided between his daughters Marian and Mary. This is one of them; and to save her portion of the property, the law required her to marry her next of kin. She is now my wife."

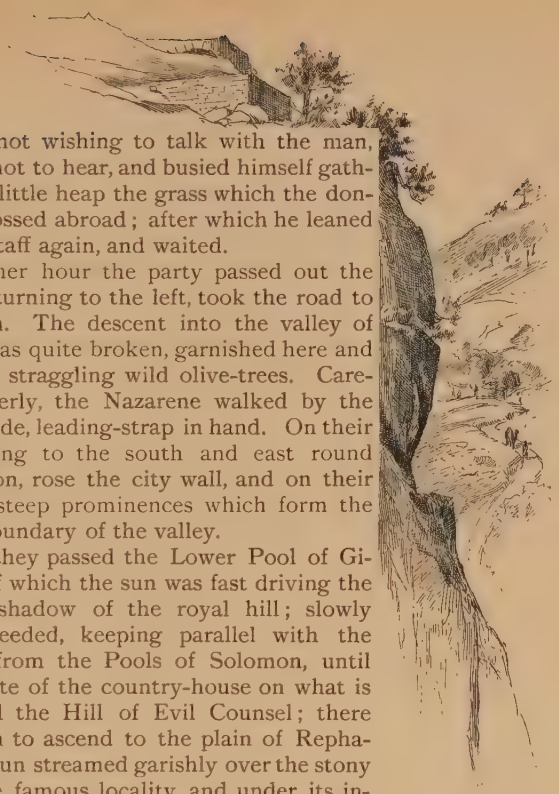
"And you were—"

"Her uncle."

"Yes, yes! And as you were both born in Bethlehem, the Roman compels you to take her there with you to be also counted."

The Rabbi clasped his hands, and looked indignantly to heaven, exclaiming, "The God of Israel still lives! The vengeance is his!"

With that he turned and abruptly departed. A stranger near by, observing Joseph's amazement, said, quietly, "Rabbi Samuel is a zealot. Judas himself is not more fierce."



Joseph, not wishing to talk with the man, appeared not to hear, and busied himself gathering in a little heap the grass which the donkey had tossed abroad; after which he leaned upon his staff again, and waited.

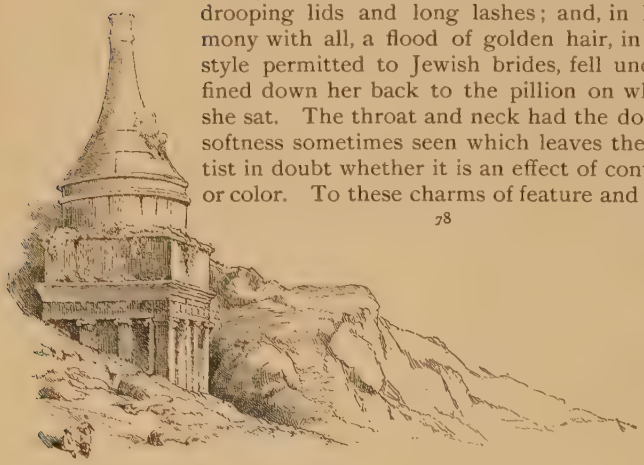
In another hour the party passed out the gate, and, turning to the left, took the road to Bethlehem. The descent into the valley of Hinnom was quite broken, garnished here and there with straggling wild olive-trees. Carefully, tenderly, the Nazarene walked by the woman's side, leading-strap in hand. On their left, reaching to the south and east round Mount Zion, rose the city wall, and on their right the steep prominences which form the western boundary of the valley.

Slowly they passed the Lower Pool of Gihon, out of which the sun was fast driving the lessening shadow of the royal hill; slowly they proceeded, keeping parallel with the aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon, until near the site of the country-house on what is now called the Hill of Evil Counsel; there they began to ascend to the plain of Rephaim. The sun streamed garishly over the stony face of the famous locality, and under its influence Mary, the daughter of Joachim, dropped the wimple entirely, and bared her head. Joseph told the story of the Philistines surprised in their camp there by David. He was tedious in the narrative, speaking with the solemn countenance and lifeless manner of a dull man. She did not always hear him.

Wherever on the land men go, and on the

sea ships, the face and figure of the Jew are familiar. The physical type of the race has always been the same; yet there have been some individual variations. "Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to." Such was the son of Jesse when brought before Samuel. The fancies of men have been ever since ruled by the description. Poetic license has extended the peculiarities of the ancestor to his notable descendants. So all our ideal Solomons have fair faces, and hair and beard chestnut in the shade, and of the tint of gold in the sun. Such, we are also made believe, were the locks of Absalom the beloved. And, in the absence of authentic history, tradition has dealt no less lovingly by her whom we are now following down to the native city of the ruddy king.

She was not more than fifteen. Her form, voice, and manner belonged to the period of transition from girlhood. Her face was perfectly oval, her complexion more pale than fair. The nose was faultless; the lips, slightly parted, were full and ripe, giving to the lines of the mouth warmth, tenderness, and trust; the eyes were blue and large, and shaded by drooping lids and long lashes; and, in harmony with all, a flood of golden hair, in the style permitted to Jewish brides, fell unconfined down her back to the pillion on which she sat. The throat and neck had the downy softness sometimes seen which leaves the artist in doubt whether it is an effect of contour or color. To these charms of feature and per-



son were added others more indefinable--an air of purity which only the soul can impart, and of abstraction natural to such as think much of things impalpable. Often, with trembling lips, she raised her eyes to heaven, itself not more deeply blue; often she crossed her hands upon her breast, as in adoration and prayer; often she raised her head like one listening eagerly for a calling voice. Now and then, midst his slow utterances, Joseph turned to look at her, and, catching the expression kindling her face as with light, forgot his theme, and with bowed head, wondering, plodded on.

So they skirted the great plain, and at length reached the elevation Mar Elias; from which, across a valley, they beheld Bethlehem, the old, old House of Bread, its white walls crowning a ridge, and shining above the brown scumbling of leafless orchards. They paused there, and rested, while Joseph pointed out the places of sacred renown; then they went down into the valley to the well which was the scene of one of the marvellous exploits of David's strong men. The narrow space was crowded with people and animals. A fear came upon Joseph —a fear lest, if the town were so thronged, there might not be house-room for the gentle Mary. Without delay, he hurried on, past the pillar of stone marking the tomb of Rachel, up the gardened slope, saluting none of the many persons he met on the way, until he stopped before the portal of the khan that then stood outside the village gates, near a junction of roads.

CHAPTER IX

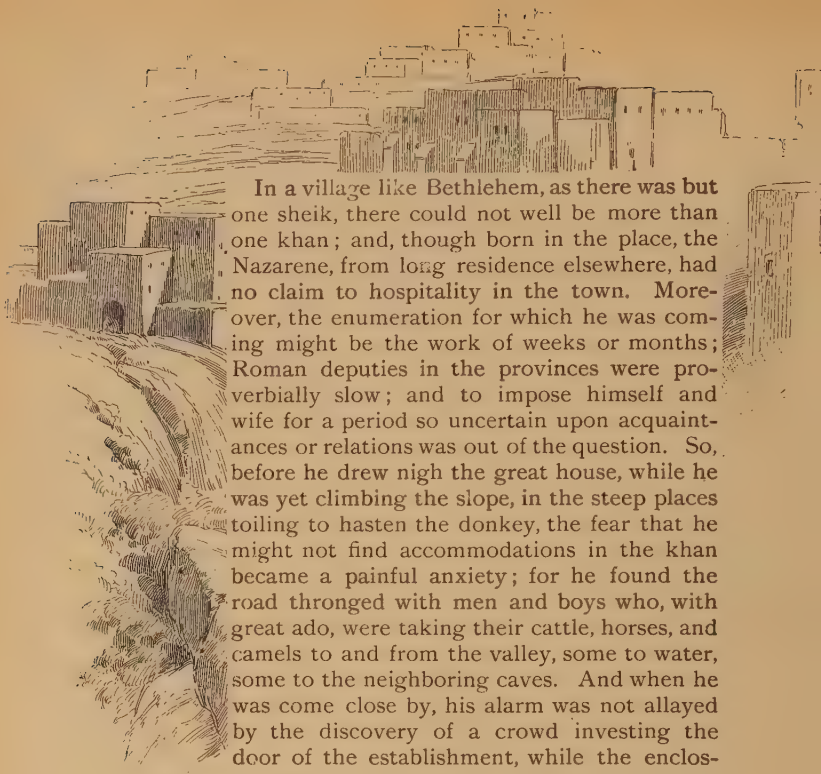
THE CAVE AT BETHLEHEM

TO understand thoroughly what happened to the Nazarene at the khan, the reader must be reminded that Eastern inns were different from the inns of the Western world. They were called khans, from the Persian, and, in simplest form, were fenced enclosures, without house or shed, often without a gate or entrance. Their sites were chosen with reference to shade, defence, or water. Such were the inns that sheltered Jacob when he went to seek a wife in Padan-Aram. Their like may be seen at this day in the stopping-places of the desert. On the other hand, some of them, especially those on the roads between great cities, like Jerusalem and Alexandria, were princely establishments, monuments to the piety of the kings who built them. In ordinary, however, they were no more than the house or possession of a sheik, in which, as in headquarters, he swayed his tribe. Lodging the traveller was the least of their uses; they were markets, factories, forts; places of assemblage and residence for merchants and artisans quite as much as places of shelter for belated and wandering wayfarers. Within their walls, all the year round, occurred the multiplied daily transactions of a town.

The singular management of these hostelries

was the feature likely to strike a Western mind with most force. There was no host or hostess; no clerk, cook, or kitchen; a steward at the gate was all the assertion of government or proprietorship anywhere visible. Strangers arriving stayed at will without rendering account. A consequence of the system was that whoever came had to bring his food and culinary outfit with him, or buy them of dealers in the khan. The same rule held good as to his bed and bedding, and forage for his beasts. Water, rest, shelter, and protection were all he looked for from the proprietor, and they were gratuities. The peace of synagogues was sometimes broken by brawling disputants, but that of the khans never. The houses and all their appurtenances were sacred: a well was not more so.

The khan at Bethlehem, before which Joseph and his wife stopped, was a good specimen of its class, being neither very primitive nor very princely. The building was purely Oriental; that is to say, a quadrangular block of rough stones, one story high, flat-roofed, externally unbroken by a window, and with but one principal entrance—a doorway, which was also a gateway, on the eastern side, or front. The road ran by the door so near that the chalk dust half covered the lintel. A fence of flat rocks, beginning at the north-eastern corner of the pile, extended many yards down the slope to a point from whence it swept westwardly to a limestone bluff; making what was in the highest degree essential to a respectable khan—a safe enclosure for animals.



In a village like Bethlehem, as there was but one sheik, there could not well be more than one khan; and, though born in the place, the Nazarene, from long residence elsewhere, had no claim to hospitality in the town. Moreover, the enumeration for which he was coming might be the work of weeks or months; Roman deputies in the provinces were proverbially slow; and to impose himself and wife for a period so uncertain upon acquaintances or relations was out of the question. So, before he drew nigh the great house, while he was yet climbing the slope, in the steep places toiling to hasten the donkey, the fear that he might not find accommodations in the khan became a painful anxiety; for he found the road thronged with men and boys who, with great ado, were taking their cattle, horses, and camels to and from the valley, some to water, some to the neighboring caves. And when he was come close by, his alarm was not allayed by the discovery of a crowd investing the door of the establishment, while the enclosure adjoining, broad as it was, seemed already full.

"We cannot reach the door," Joseph said, in his slow way. "Let us stop here, and learn, if we can, what has happened."

The wife, without answering, quietly drew the wimple aside. The look of fatigue at first upon her face changed to one of interest. She found herself at the edge of an assemblage that could not be other than a matter of curiosity to her, although it was common enough

WITHIN THE JAFFA GATE, JERUSALEM

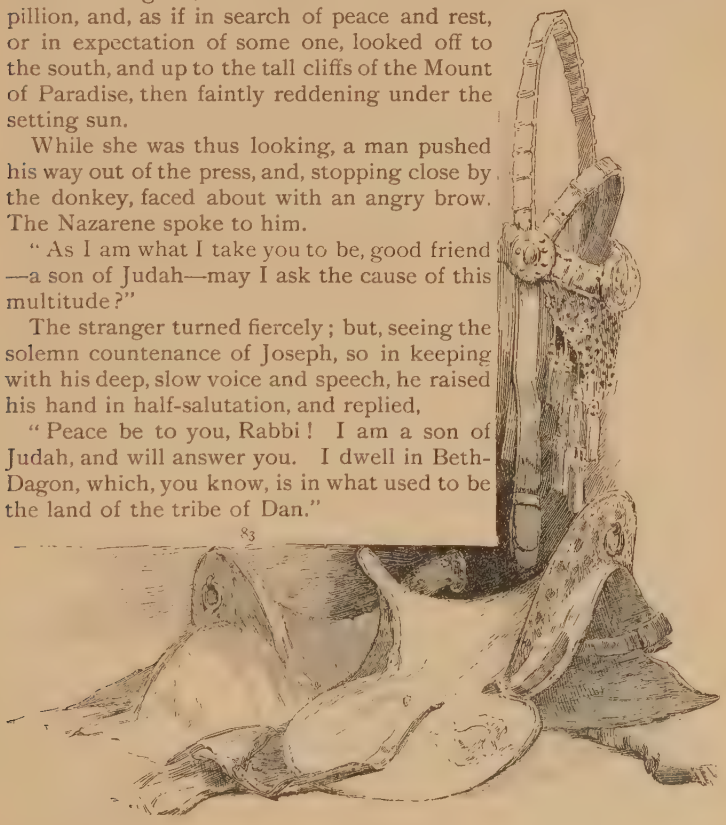
at the khans on any of the highways which the great caravans were accustomed to traverse. There were men on foot, running hither and thither, talking shrilly and in all the tongues of Syria; men on horseback screaming to men on camels; men struggling doubtfully with fractious cows and frightened sheep; men peddling bread and wine; and among the mass a herd of boys apparently in chase of a herd of dogs. Everybody and everything seemed to be in motion at the same time. Possibly the fair spectator was too weary to be long attracted by the scene; in a little while she sighed, and settled down on the pillion, and, as if in search of peace and rest, or in expectation of some one, looked off to the south, and up to the tall cliffs of the Mount of Paradise, then faintly reddening under the setting sun.

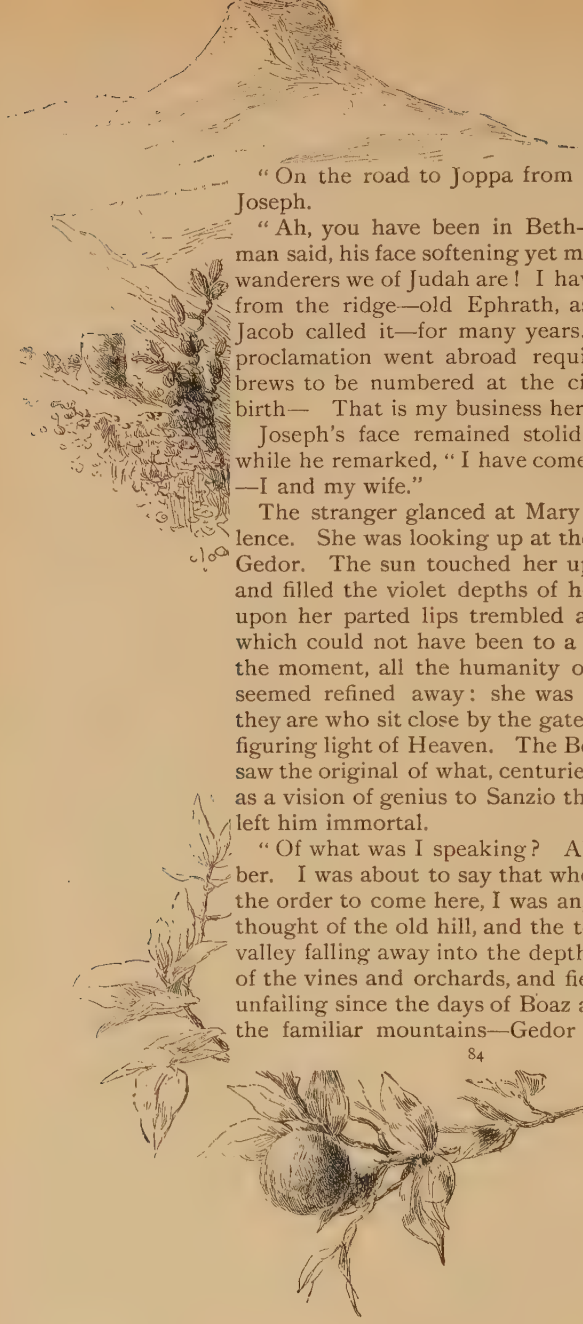
While she was thus looking, a man pushed his way out of the press, and, stopping close by the donkey, faced about with an angry brow. The Nazarene spoke to him.

"As I am what I take you to be, good friend —a son of Judah—may I ask the cause of this multitude?"

The stranger turned fiercely; but, seeing the solemn countenance of Joseph, so in keeping with his deep, slow voice and speech, he raised his hand in half-salutation, and replied,

"Peace be to you, Rabbi! I am a son of Judah, and will answer you. I dwell in Beth-Dagon, which, you know, is in what used to be the land of the tribe of Dan."





"On the road to Joppa from Modin," said Joseph.

"Ah, you have been in Beth-Dagon," the man said, his face softening yet more. "What wanderers we of Judah are! I have been away from the ridge—old Ephrath, as our father Jacob called it—for many years. When the proclamation went abroad requiring all Hebrews to be numbered at the cities of their birth— That is my business here, Rabbi."

Joseph's face remained stolid as a mask, while he remarked, "I have come for that also —I and my wife."

The stranger glanced at Mary and kept silence. She was looking up at the bald top of Gedor. The sun touched her upturned face, and filled the violet depths of her eyes; and upon her parted lips trembled an aspiration which could not have been to a mortal. For the moment, all the humanity of her beauty seemed refined away: she was as we fancy they are who sit close by the gate in the transfiguring light of Heaven. The Beth-Dagonite saw the original of what, centuries after, came as a vision of genius to Sanzio the divine, and left him immortal.

"Of what was I speaking? Ah! I remember. I was about to say that when I heard of the order to come here, I was angry. Then I thought of the old hill, and the town, and the valley falling away into the depths of Cedron; of the vines and orchards, and fields of grain, unfailing since the days of Boaz and Ruth; of the familiar mountains—Gedor here, Gibeah

yonder, Mar Elias there—which, when I was a boy, were the walls of the world to me; and I forgave the tyrants and came—I, and Rachel, my wife, and Deborah and Michal, our roses of Sharon."

The man paused again, looking abruptly at Mary, who was now looking at him and listening. Then he said, "Rabbi, will not your wife go to mine? You may see her yonder with the children, under the leaning olive-tree at the bend of the road. I tell you"—he turned to Joseph and spoke positively—"I tell you the khan is full. It is useless to ask at the gate."

Joseph's will was slow, like his mind; he hesitated, but at length replied, "The offer is kind. Whether there be room for us or not in the house, we will go see your people. Let me speak to the gate-keeper myself. I will return quickly."

And, putting the leading-strap in the stranger's hand, he pushed into the stirring crowd.

The keeper sat on a great cedar block outside the gate. Against the wall behind him leaned a javelin. A dog squatted on the block by his side.

"The peace of Jehovah be with you," said Joseph, at last confronting the keeper.

"What you give, may you find again; and, when found, be it many times multiplied to you and yours," returned the watchman, gravely, though without moving.

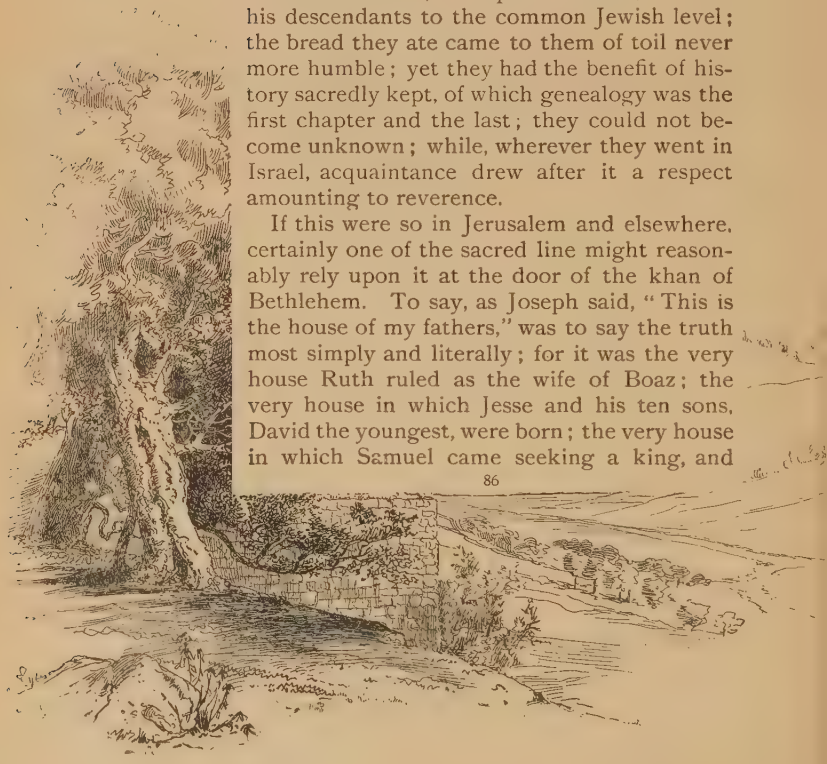
"I am a Bethlehemite," said Joseph, in his most deliberate way. "Is there not room for—"

"There is not."

"You may have heard of me—Joseph of Nazareth. This is the house of my fathers. I am of the line of David."

These words held the Nazarene's hope. If they failed him, further appeal was idle, even that of the offer of many shekels. To be a son of Judah was one thing—in the tribal opinion a great thing; to be of the house of David was yet another; on the tongue of a Hebrew there could be no higher boast. A thousand years and more had passed since the boyish shepherd became the successor of Saul and founded a royal family. Wars, calamities, other kings, and the countless obscuring processes of time had, as respects fortune, lowered his descendants to the common Jewish level; the bread they ate came to them of toil never more humble; yet they had the benefit of history sacredly kept, of which genealogy was the first chapter and the last; they could not become unknown; while, wherever they went in Israel, acquaintance drew after it a respect amounting to reverence.

If this were so in Jerusalem and elsewhere, certainly one of the sacred line might reasonably rely upon it at the door of the khan of Bethlehem. To say, as Joseph said, "This is the house of my fathers," was to say the truth most simply and literally; for it was the very house Ruth ruled as the wife of Boaz; the very house in which Jesse and his ten sons, David the youngest, were born; the very house in which Samuel came seeking a king, and



found him; the very house which David gave to the son of Barzillai, the friendly Gileadite; the very house in which Jeremiah, by prayer, rescued the remnant of his race flying before the Babylonians.

The appeal was not without effect. The keeper of the gate slid down from the cedar block, and, laying his hand upon his beard, said, respectfully, "Rabbi, I cannot tell you when this door first opened in welcome to the traveller, but it was more than a thousand years ago; and in all that time there is no known instance of a good man turned away, save when there was no room to rest him in. If it has been so with the stranger, just cause must the steward have who says no to one of the line of David. Wherefore, I salute you again; and, if you care to go with me, I will show you that there is not a lodging-place left in the house; neither in the chambers, nor in the lewens, nor in the court—not even on the roof. May I ask when you came?"

"But now."

The keeper smiled.

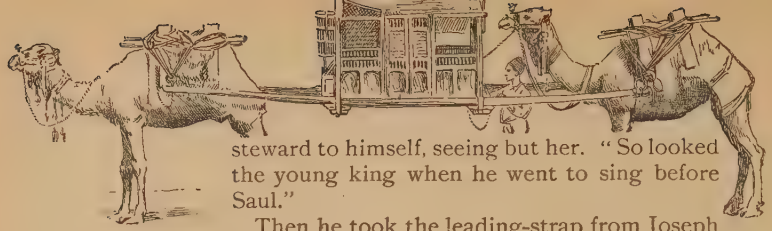
"'The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.' Is not that the law, Rabbi?"

Joseph was silent.

"If it be the law, can I say to one a long time come, 'Go thy way; another is here to take thy place?'"

Yet Joseph held his peace.

"And, if I said so, to whom would the place



steward to himself, seeing but her. "So looked the young king when he went to sing before Saul."

Then he took the leading-strap from Joseph and said to Mary, "Peace to you, O daughter of David!" Then to the others, "Peace to you all!" Then to Joseph, "Rabbi, follow me."

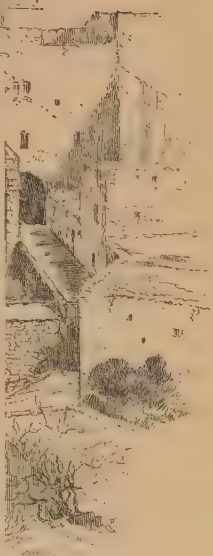
The party were conducted into a wide passage paved with stone, from which they entered the court of the khan. To a stranger the scene would have been curious; but they noticed the lewens that yawned darkly upon them from all sides, and the court itself, only to remark how crowded they were. By a lane reserved in the stowage of the cargoes, and thence by a passage similar to the one at the entrance, they emerged into the enclosure adjoining the house, and came upon camels, horses, and donkeys, tethered and dozing in close groups; among them were the keepers, men of many lands; and they, too, slept or kept silent watch. They went down the slope of the crowded yard slowly, for the dull carriers of the women had wills of their own. At length they turned into a path running towards the gray limestone bluff overlooking the khan on the west.

"We are going to the cave," said Joseph, laconically.

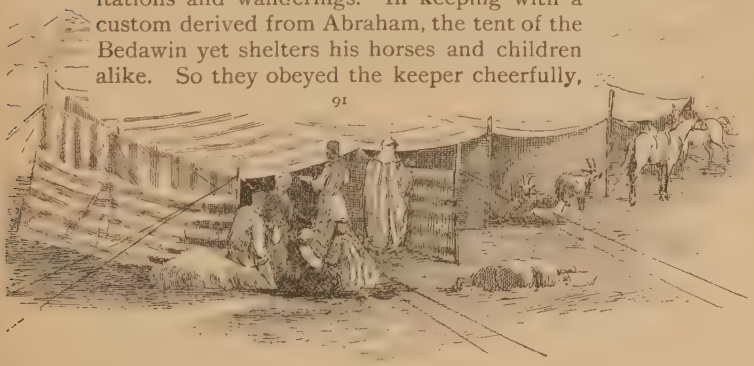
The guide lingered till Mary came to his side.

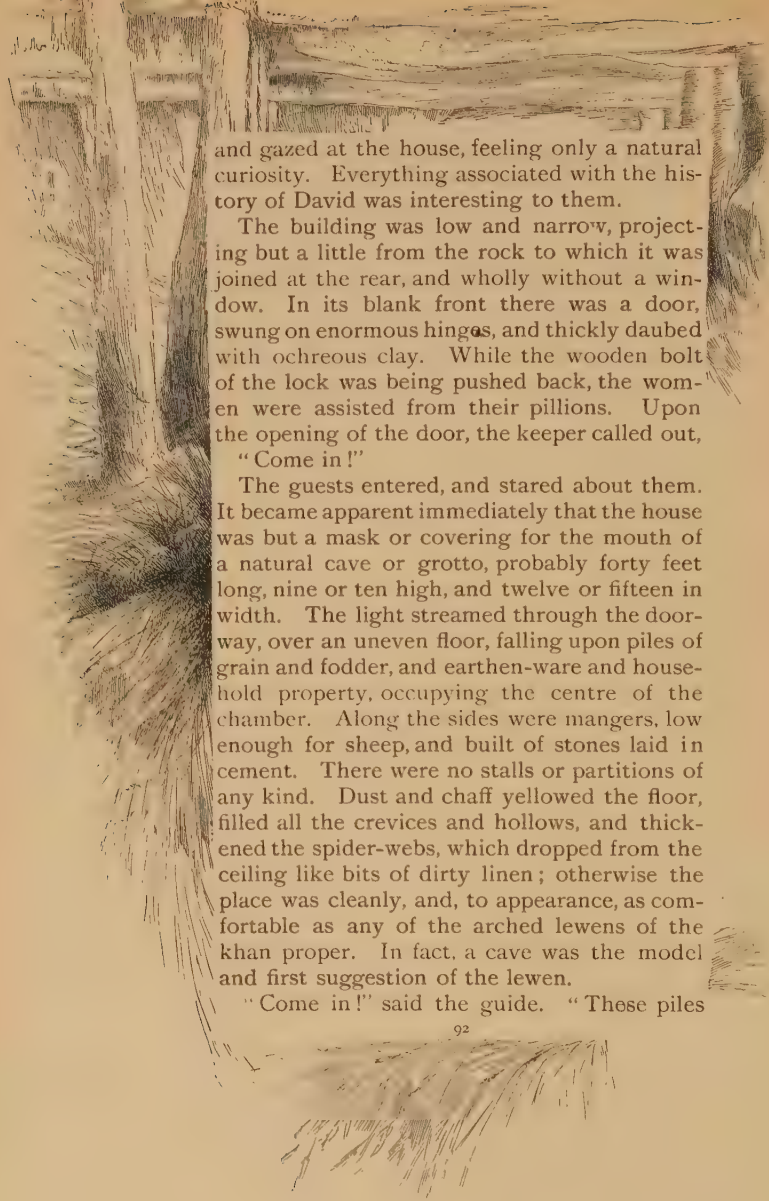
"The cave to which we are going," he said to her, "must have been a resort of your ancestor David. From the field below us, and

from the well down in the valley, he used to drive his flocks to it for safety; and afterwards, when he was king, he came back to the old house here for rest and health, bringing great trains of animals. The mangers yet remain as they were in his day. Better a bed upon the floor where he has slept than one in the court-yard or out by the road-side. Ah, here is the house before the cave!"



This speech must not be taken as an apology for the lodging offered. There was no need of apology. The place was the best then at disposal. The guests were simple folks, by habits of life easily satisfied. To the Jew of that period, moreover, abode in caverns was a familiar idea, made so by every-day occurrences, and by what he heard of Sabbaths in the synagogues. How much of Jewish history, how many of the most exciting incidents in that history, had transpired in caves! Yet further, these people were Jews of Bethlehem, with whom the idea was especially commonplace; for their locality abounded with caves great and small, some of which had been dwelling-places from the time of the Emim and Horites. No more was there offence to them in the fact that the cavern to which they were being taken had been, or was, a stable. They were the descendants of a race of herdsmen, whose flocks habitually shared both their habitations and wanderings. In keeping with a custom derived from Abraham, the tent of the Bedawin yet shelters his horses and children alike. So they obeyed the keeper cheerfully,





and gazed at the house, feeling only a natural curiosity. Everything associated with the history of David was interesting to them.

The building was low and narrow, projecting but a little from the rock to which it was joined at the rear, and wholly without a window. In its blank front there was a door, swung on enormous hinges, and thickly daubed with ochreous clay. While the wooden bolt of the lock was being pushed back, the women were assisted from their pillions. Upon the opening of the door, the keeper called out,

"Come in!"

The guests entered, and stared about them. It became apparent immediately that the house was but a mask or covering for the mouth of a natural cave or grotto, probably forty feet long, nine or ten high, and twelve or fifteen in width. The light streamed through the doorway, over an uneven floor, falling upon piles of grain and fodder, and earthen-ware and household property, occupying the centre of the chamber. Along the sides were mangers, low enough for sheep, and built of stones laid in cement. There were no stalls or partitions of any kind. Dust and chaff yellowed the floor, filled all the crevices and hollows, and thickened the spider-webs, which dropped from the ceiling like bits of dirty linen; otherwise the place was cleanly, and, to appearance, as comfortable as any of the arched lewens of the khan proper. In fact, a cave was the model and first suggestion of the lewen.

"Come in!" said the guide. "These piles

upon the floor are for travellers like yourselves. Take what of them you need."

Then he spoke to Mary.

"Can you rest here?"

"The place is sanctified," she answered.

"I leave you then. Peace be with you all!"

When he was gone, they busied themselves making the cave habitable.

CHAPTER X

THE LIGHT IN THE SKY

AT a certain hour in the evening the shouting and stir of the people in and about the khan ceased; at the same time, every Israelite, if not already upon his feet, arose, solemnized his face, looked towards Jerusalem, crossed his hands upon his breast, and prayed; for it was the sacred ninth hour, when sacrifices were offered in the temple on Moriah, and God was supposed to be there. When the hands of the worshippers fell down, the commotion broke forth again; everybody hastened to bread, or to make his pallet. A little later, the lights were put out, and there was silence, and then sleep.

. . . . . .

About midnight some one on the roof cried out, "What light is that in the sky? Awake, brethren, awake and see!"

The people, half asleep, sat up and looked; then they became wide awake, though wonderstruck. And the stir spread to the court be-

low, and into the lewens; soon the entire tenantry of the house and court and enclosure were out gazing at the sky.

And this was what they saw: a ray of light, beginning at a height immeasurably beyond the nearest stars, and dropping obliquely to the earth; at its top, a diminishing point; at its base, many furlongs in width; its sides blending softly with the darkness of the night; its core a roseate electrical splendor. The apparition seemed to rest on the nearest mountain south-east of the town, making a pale corona along the line of the summit. The khan was touched luminously, so that those upon the roof saw each other's faces, all filled with wonder.

Steadily, through minutes, the ray lingered, and then the wonder changed to awe and fear; the timid trembled; the boldest spoke in whispers.

"Saw you ever the like?" asked one.

"It seems just over the mountain there. I cannot tell what it is, nor did I ever see anything like it," was the answer.

"Can it be that a star has burst and fallen?" asked another, his tongue faltering.

"When a star falls, its light goes out."

"I have it!" cried one, confidently. "The shepherds have seen a lion, and made fires to keep him from the flocks."

The men next the speaker drew a breath of relief, and said, "Yes, that is it! The flocks were grazing in the valley over there to-day."

A by-stander dispelled the comfort.

"No, no! Though all the wood in all the valleys of Judah was brought together in one pile and fired, the blaze would not throw a light so strong and high."

After that there was silence on the housetop, broken but once again while the mystery continued.

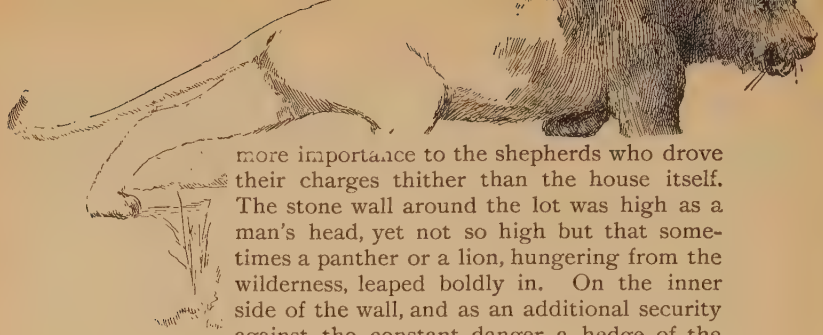
"Brethren!" exclaimed a Jew of venerable mien, "what we see is the ladder our father Jacob saw in his dream. Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers!"

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST IS BORN

A MILE and a half, it may be two miles, south-east of Bethlehem, there is a plain separated from the town by an intervening swell of the mountain. Besides being well sheltered from the north winds, the vale was covered with a growth of sycamore, dwarf-oak, and pine-trees, while in the glens and ravines adjoining there were thickets of olive and mulberry; all at this season of the year invaluable for the support of sheep, goats, and cattle, of which the wandering flocks consisted.

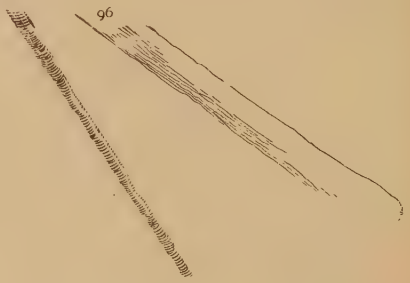
At the side farthest from the town, close under a bluff, there was an extensive mârâh, or sheepcot, ages old. In some long-forgotten foray, the building had been unroofed and almost demolished. The enclosure attached to it remained intact, however, and that was of



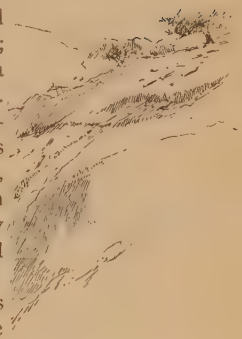
more importance to the shepherds who drove their charges thither than the house itself. The stone wall around the lot was high as a man's head, yet not so high but that sometimes a panther or a lion, hungering from the wilderness, leaped boldly in. On the inner side of the wall, and as an additional security against the constant danger, a hedge of the rhamnus had been planted, an invention so successful that now a sparrow could hardly penetrate the overtopping branches, armed as they were with great clusters of thorns hard as spikes.

The day of the occurrences which occupy the preceding chapters, a number of shepherds, seeking fresh walks for their flocks, led them up to this plain; and from early morning the groves had been made ring with calls, and the blows of axes, the bleating of sheep and goats, the tinkling of bells, the lowing of cattle, and the barking of dogs. When the sun went down, they led the way to the mârâh, and by nightfall had everything safe in the field; then they kindled a fire down by the gate, partook of their humble supper, and sat down to rest and talk, leaving one on watch.

There were six of these men, omitting the watchman; and afterwhile they assembled in a group near the fire, some sitting, some lying prone. As they went bareheaded habitually, their hair stood out in thick, coarse, sunburnt shocks; their beard covered their throats, and fell in mats down the breast; mantles of the skin of kids and lambs, with the fleece on,



wrapped them from neck to knee, leaving the arms exposed; broad belts girthed the rude garments to their waists; their sandals were of the coarsest quality; from their right shoulders hung scrips containing food and selected stones for slings, with which they were armed; on the ground near each one lay his crook, a symbol of his calling and a weapon of offence.



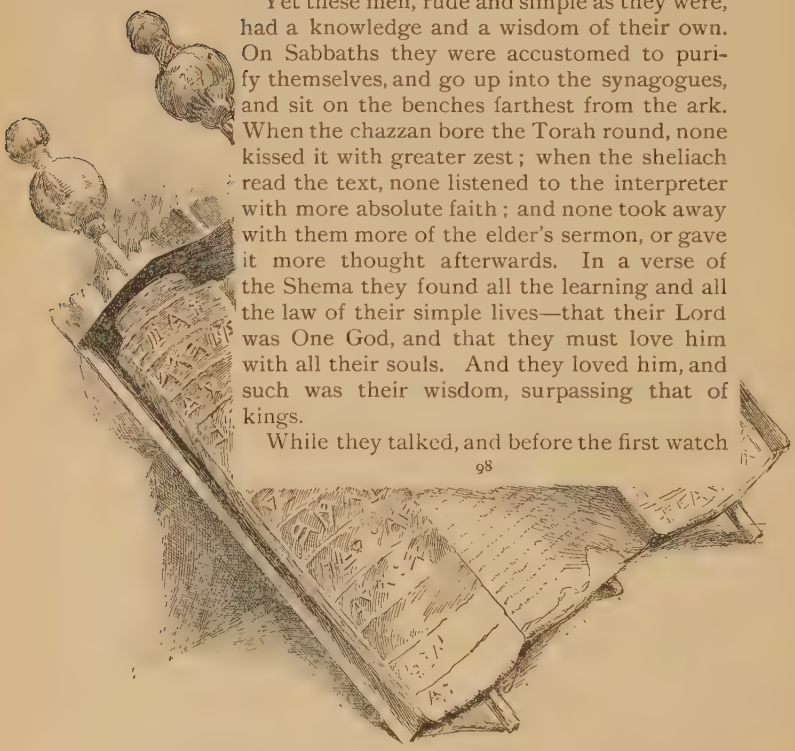
Such were the shepherds of Judea! In appearance, rough and savage as the gaunt dogs sitting with them around the blaze; in fact, simple-minded, tender-hearted: effects due, in part, to the primitive life they led, but chiefly to their constant care of things lovable and helpless.

They rested and talked; and their talk was all about their flocks, a dull theme to the world, yet a theme which was all the world to them. If in narrative they dwelt long upon affairs of trifling moment; if one of them omitted nothing of detail in recounting the loss of a lamb, the relation between him and the unfortunate should be remembered: at birth it became his charge, his to keep all its days, to help over the floods, to carry down the hollows, to name and train; it was to be his companion, his object of thought and interest, the subject of his will; it was to enliven and share his wanderings; in its defence he might be called on to face the lion or robber—to die.

The great events, such as blotted out nations and changed the mastery of the world, were trifles to them, if perchance they came to their knowledge. Of what Herod was do-

ing in this city or that, building palaces and gymnasia, and indulging forbidden practices, they occasionally heard. As was her habit in those days, Rome did not wait for people slow to inquire about her; she came to them. Over the hills along which he was leading his lagging herd, or in the fastnesses in which he was hiding them, not unfrequently the shepherd was startled by the blare of trumpets, and, peering out, beheld a cohort, sometimes a legion, in march; and when the glittering crests were gone, and the excitement incident to the intrusion over, he bent himself to evolve the meaning of the eagles and gilded globes of the soldiery, and the charm of a life so the opposite of his own.

Yet these men, rude and simple as they were, had a knowledge and a wisdom of their own. On Sabbaths they were accustomed to purify themselves, and go up into the synagogues, and sit on the benches farthest from the ark. When the chazzan bore the Torah round, none kissed it with greater zest; when the sheliach read the text, none listened to the interpreter with more absolute faith; and none took away with them more of the elder's sermon, or gave it more thought afterwards. In a verse of the Shema they found all the learning and all the law of their simple lives—that their Lord was One God, and that they must love him with all their souls. And they loved him, and such was their wisdom, surpassing that of kings.



While they talked, and before the first watch

was over, one by one the shepherds went to sleep, each lying where he had sat.

The night, like most nights of the winter season in the hill country, was clear, crisp, and sparkling with stars. There was no wind. The atmosphere seemed never so pure, and the stillness was more than silence; it was a holy hush, a warning that heaven was stooping low to whisper some good thing to the listening earth.

By the gate, hugging his mantle close, the watchman walked; at times he stopped, attracted by a stir among the sleeping herds, or by a jackal's cry off on the mountain-side. The midnight was slow coming to him; but at last it came. His task was done; now for the dreamless sleep with which labor blesses its wearied children! He moved towards the fire, but paused; a light was breaking around him, soft and white, like the moon's. He waited breathlessly. The light deepened; things before invisible came to view; he saw the whole field, and all it sheltered. A chill sharper than that of the frosty air—a chill of fear—smote him. He looked up; the stars were gone; the light was dropping as from a window in the sky; as he looked, it became a splendor; then, in terror, he cried,

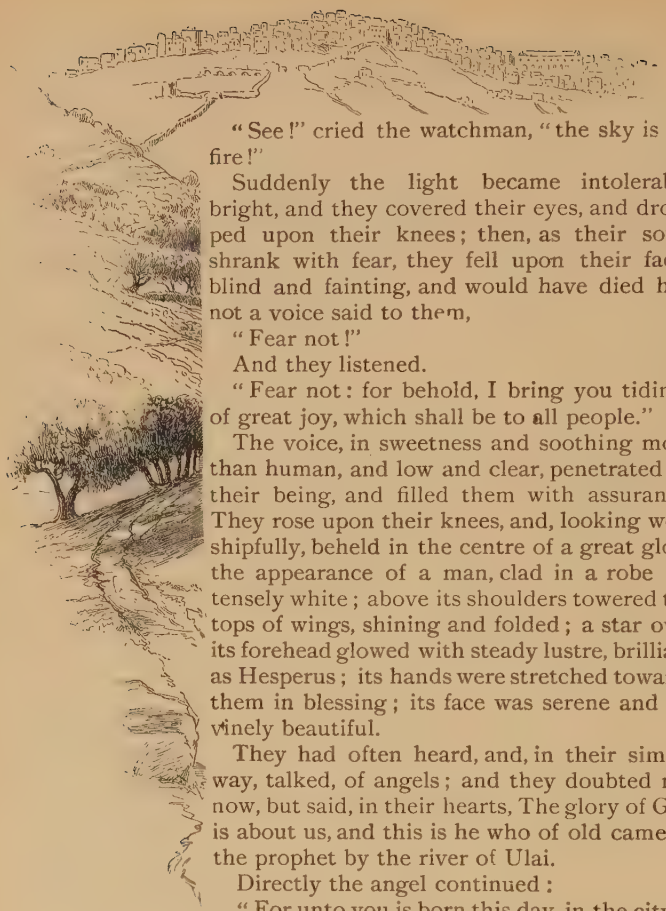
"Awake, awake!"

Up sprang the dogs, and, howling, ran away.

The herds rushed together bewildered.

The men clambered to their feet, weapons in hand.

"What is it?" they asked, in one voice.



"See!" cried the watchman, "the sky is on fire!"

Suddenly the light became intolerably bright, and they covered their eyes, and dropped upon their knees; then, as their souls shrank with fear, they fell upon their faces blind and fainting, and would have died had not a voice said to them,

"Fear not!"

And they listened.

"Fear not: for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

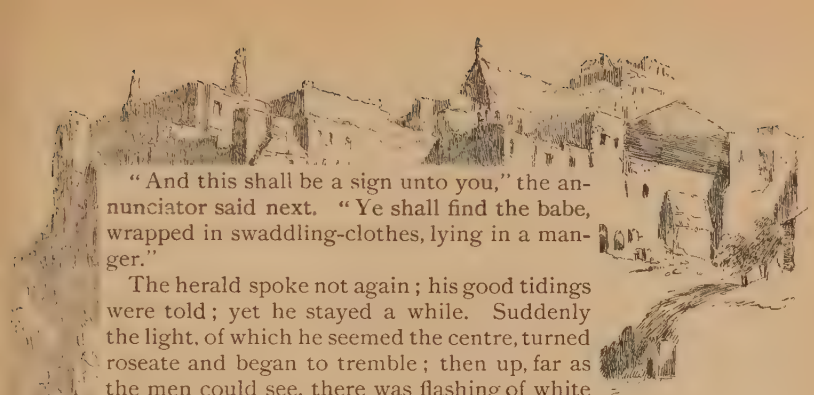
The voice, in sweetness and soothing more than human, and low and clear, penetrated all their being, and filled them with assurance. They rose upon their knees, and, looking worshipfully, beheld in the centre of a great glory the appearance of a man, clad in a robe intensely white; above its shoulders towered the tops of wings, shining and folded; a star over its forehead glowed with steady lustre, brilliant as Hesperus; its hands were stretched towards them in blessing; its face was serene and divinely beautiful.

They had often heard, and, in their simple way, talked, of angels; and they doubted not now, but said, in their hearts, The glory of God is about us, and this is he who of old came to the prophet by the river of Ulai.

Directly the angel continued:

"For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!"

Again there was a rest, while the words sank into their minds.



"And this shall be a sign unto you," the annunciator said next. "Ye shall find the babe, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger."

The herald spoke not again; his good tidings were told; yet he stayed a while. Suddenly the light, of which he seemed the centre, turned roseate and began to tremble; then up, far as the men could see, there was flashing of white wings, and coming and going of radiant forms, and voices as of a multitude chanting in unison,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

Not once the praise, but many times.

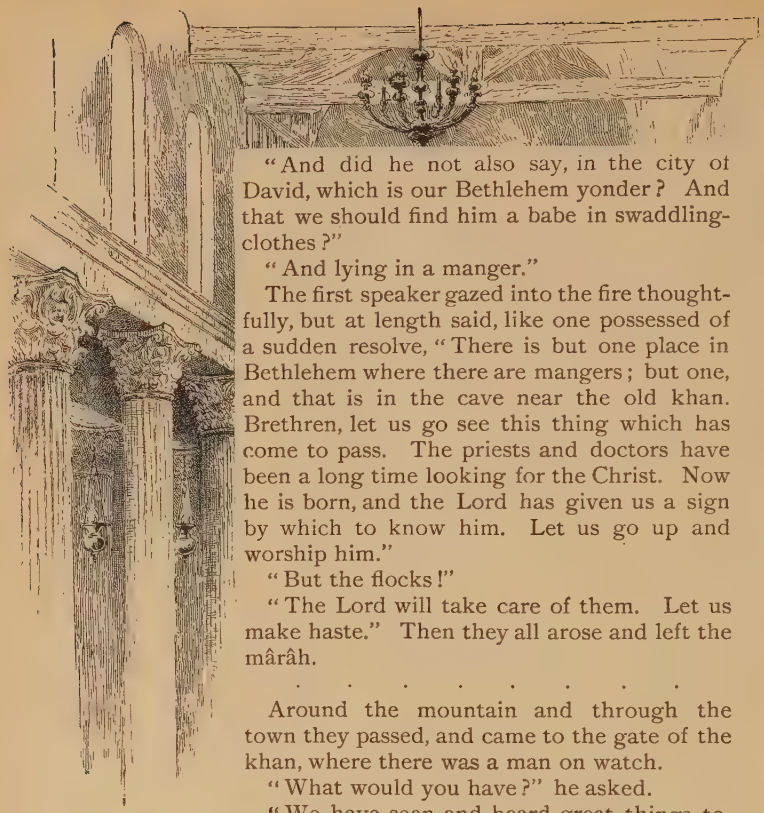
Then the herald raised his eyes as seeking approval of one far off; his wings stirred, and spread slowly and majestically, on their upper side white as snow, in the shadow vari-tinted, like mother-of-pearl; when they were expanded many cubits beyond his stature, he arose lightly, and, without effort, floated out of view, taking the light up with him. Long after he was gone, down from the sky fell the refrain in measure mellowed by distance, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

When the shepherds came fully to their senses, they stared at each other stupidly, until one of them said, "It was Gabriel, the Lord's messenger unto men."

None answered.

"Christ the Lord is born; said he not so?"

Then another recovered his voice, and replied, "That is what he said."



"And did he not also say, in the city of David, which is our Bethlehem yonder? And that we should find him a babe in swaddling-clothes?"

"And lying in a manger."

The first speaker gazed into the fire thoughtfully, but at length said, like one possessed of a sudden resolve, "There is but one place in Bethlehem where there are mangers; but one, and that is in the cave near the old khan. Brethren, let us go see this thing which has come to pass. The priests and doctors have been a long time looking for the Christ. Now he is born, and the Lord has given us a sign by which to know him. Let us go up and worship him."

"But the flocks!"

"The Lord will take care of them. Let us make haste." Then they all arose and left the mârâh.

. . . . . .

Around the mountain and through the town they passed, and came to the gate of the khan, where there was a man on watch.

"What would you have?" he asked.

"We have seen and heard great things to-night," they replied.

"Well, we, too, have seen great things, but heard nothing. What did you hear?"

"Let us go down to the cave in the enclosure, that we may be sure; then we will tell you all. Come with us, and see for yourself."

"It is a fool's errand."

"No, the Christ is born."

"The Christ! How do you know?"

"Let us go and see first."

The man laughed scornfully.

"The Christ indeed! How are you to know him?"

"He was born this night, and is now lying in a manger, so we were told; and there is but one place in Bethlehem with mangers."

"The cave?"

"Yes. Come with us."

They went through the court-yard without notice, although there were some up even then talking about the wonderful light. The door of the cavern was open. A lantern was burning within, and they entered unceremoniously.

"I give you peace," the watchman said to Joseph and the Beth-Dagonite. "Here are people looking for a child born this night, whom they are to know by finding him in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger."

For a moment the face of the stolid Nazarene was moved; turning away, he said, "The child is here."

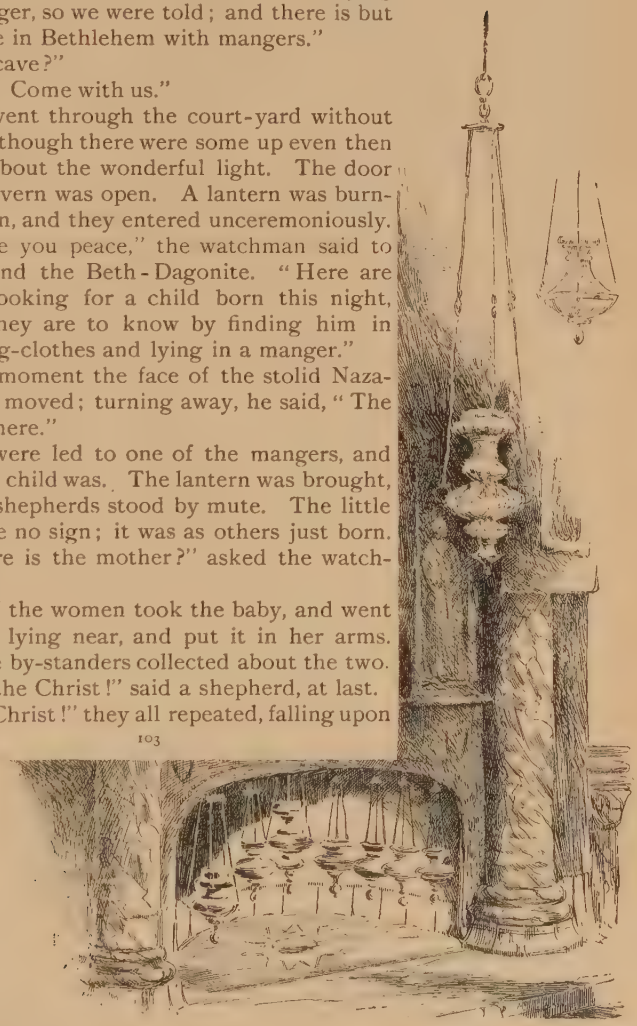
They were led to one of the mangers, and there the child was. The lantern was brought, and the shepherds stood by mute. The little one made no sign; it was as others just born.

"Where is the mother?" asked the watchman.

One of the women took the baby, and went to Mary, lying near, and put it in her arms. Then the by-standers collected about the two.

"It is the Christ!" said a shepherd, at last.

"The Christ!" they all repeated, falling upon



their knees in worship. One of them repeated several times over,

"It is the Lord, and his glory is above the earth and heaven."

And the simple men, never doubting, kissed the hem of the mother's robe, and with joyful faces departed. In the khan, to all the people aroused and pressing about them, they told their story, and through the town, and all the way back to the mârâh, they chanted the refrain of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

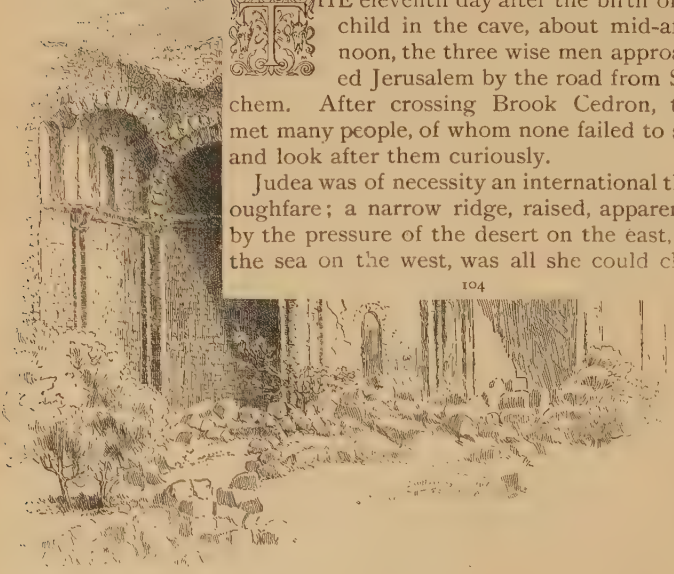
The story went abroad, confirmed by the light so generally seen; and the next day, and for days thereafter, the cave was visited by curious crowds, of whom some believed, though the greater part laughed and mocked.

CHAPTER XII

THE WISE MEN ARRIVE AT JERUSALEM

THE eleventh day after the birth of the child in the cave, about mid-afternoon, the three wise men approached Jerusalem by the road from Shechem. After crossing Brook Cedron, they met many people, of whom none failed to stop and look after them curiously.

Judea was of necessity an international thoroughfare; a narrow ridge, raised, apparently, by the pressure of the desert on the east, and the sea on the west, was all she could claim

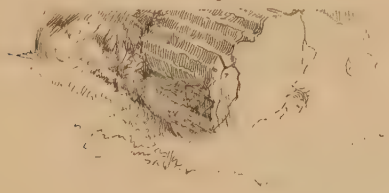


to be; over the ridge, however, nature had stretched the line of trade between the east and the south; and that was her wealth. In other words, the riches of Jerusalem were the tolls she levied on passing commerce. Nowhere else, consequently, unless in Rome, was there such constant assemblage of so many people of so many different nations, in no other city was a stranger less strange to the residents than within her walls and purlieus. And yet these three men excited the wonder of all whom they met on the way to the gates.

A child belonging to some women sitting by the road-side opposite the Tombs of the Kings saw the party coming; immediately it clapped its hands, and cried, "Look, look! What pretty bells! What big camels!"

The bells were silver; the camels, as we have seen, were of unusual size and whiteness, and moved with singular stateliness; the trappings told of the desert and of long journeys thereon, and also of ample means in possession of the owners, who sat under the little canopies exactly as they appeared at the rendezvous beyond the Jebel. Yet it was not the bells or the camels, or their furniture, or the demeanor of the riders, that were so wonderful; it was the question put by the man who rode foremost of the three.

The approach to Jerusalem from the north is across a plain which dips southward, leaving the Damascus Gate in a vale or hollow. The road is narrow, but deeply cut by long use, and in places difficult on account of the cobbles



left loose and dry by the washing of the rains. On either side, however, there stretched, in the old time, rich fields and handsome olive-groves, which must, in luxurious growth, have been beautiful, especially to travellers fresh from the wastes of the desert. In this road the three stopped before the party in front of the Tombs.

"Good people," said Balthasar, stroking his plaited beard, and bending from his cot, "is not Jerusalem close by?"

"Yes," answered the woman into whose arms the child had shrunk. "If the trees on yon swell were a little lower you could see the towers on the market-place."

Balthasar gave the Greek and the Hindoo a look, then asked,

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

The women gazed at each other without reply.

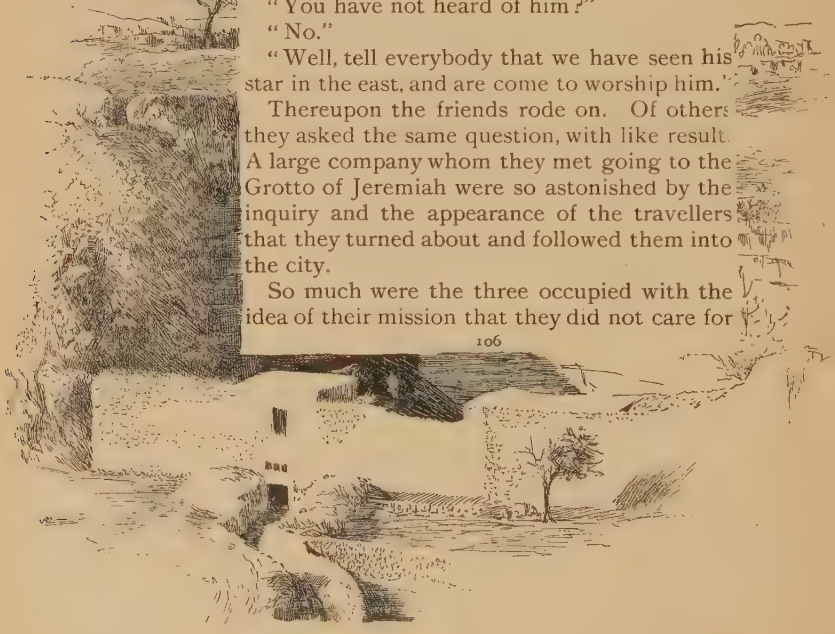
"You have not heard of him?"

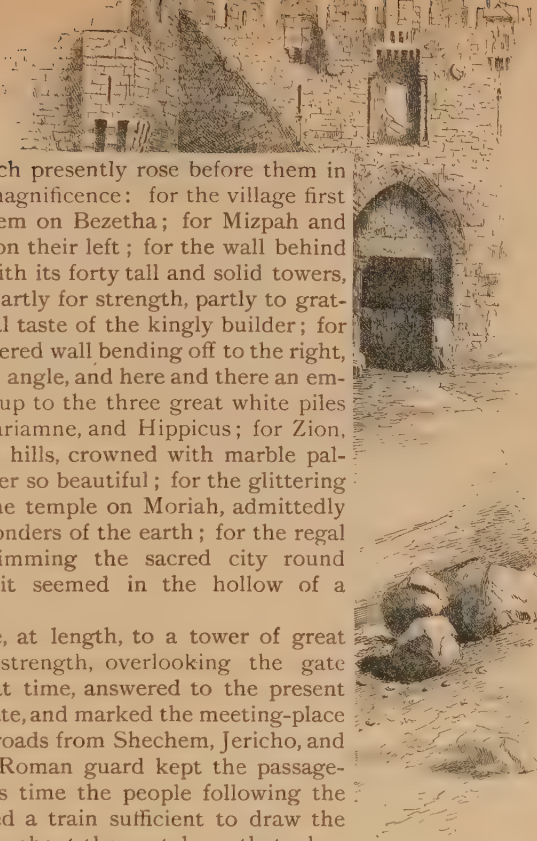
"No."

"Well, tell everybody that we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Thereupon the friends rode on. Of others they asked the same question, with like result. A large company whom they met going to the Grotto of Jeremiah were so astonished by the inquiry and the appearance of the travellers that they turned about and followed them into the city.

So much were the three occupied with the idea of their mission that they did not care for





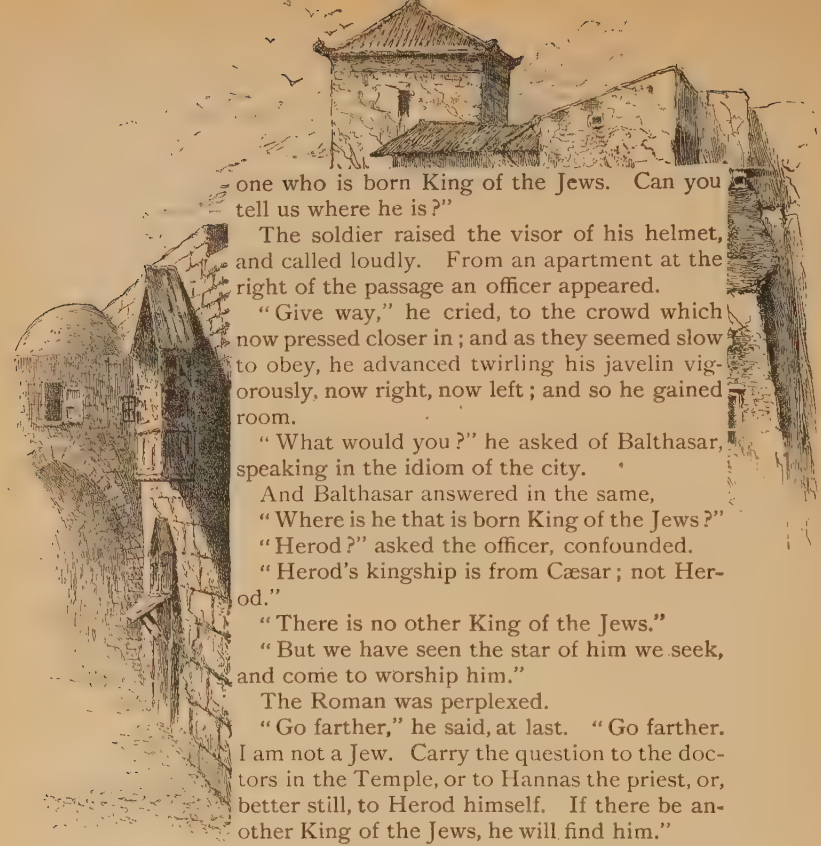
the view which presently rose before them in the utmost magnificence: for the village first to receive them on Bezetha; for Mizpah and Olivet, over on their left; for the wall behind the village, with its forty tall and solid towers, superadded partly for strength, partly to gratify the critical taste of the kingly builder; for the same towered wall bending off to the right, with many an angle, and here and there an embattled gate, up to the three great white piles Phasælus, Mariamne, and Hippicus; for Zion, tallest of the hills, crowned with marble palaces, and never so beautiful; for the glittering terraces of the temple on Moriah, admittedly one of the wonders of the earth; for the regal mountains rimming the sacred city round about until it seemed in the hollow of a mighty bowl.

They came, at length, to a tower of great height and strength, overlooking the gate which, at that time, answered to the present Damascus Gate, and marked the meeting-place of the three roads from Shechem, Jericho, and Gibeon. A Roman guard kept the passage-way. By this time the people following the camels formed a train sufficient to draw the idlers hanging about the portal; so that when Balthasar stopped to speak to the sentinel, the three became instantly the centre of a close circle eager to hear all that passed.

"I give you peace," the Egyptian said, in a clear voice.

The sentinel made no reply.

"We have come great distances in search of



one who is born King of the Jews. Can you tell us where he is?"

The soldier raised the visor of his helmet, and called loudly. From an apartment at the right of the passage an officer appeared.

"Give way," he cried, to the crowd which now pressed closer in; and as they seemed slow to obey, he advanced twirling his javelin vigorously, now right, now left; and so he gained room.

"What would you?" he asked of Balthasar, speaking in the idiom of the city.

And Balthasar answered in the same,

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

"Herod?" asked the officer, confounded.

"Herod's kingship is from Cæsar; not Herod."

"There is no other King of the Jews."

"But we have seen the star of him we seek, and come to worship him."

The Roman was perplexed.

"Go farther," he said, at last. "Go farther. I am not a Jew. Carry the question to the doctors in the Temple, or to Hannas the priest, or, better still, to Herod himself. If there be another King of the Jews, he will find him."

Thereupon he made way for the strangers, and they passed the gate. But, before entering the narrow street, Balthasar lingered to say to his friends, "We are sufficiently proclaimed. By midnight the whole city will have heard of us and of our mission. Let us to the khan now."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WITNESSES BEFORE HEROD

THAT evening, before sunset, some women were washing clothes on the upper step of the flight that led down into the basin of the Pool of Siloam. They knelt each before a broad bowl of earthen-ware. A girl at the foot of the steps kept them supplied with water, and sang while she filled the jar. The song was cheerful, and no doubt lightened their labor. Occasionally they would sit upon their heels, and look up the slope of Ophel, and round to the summit of what is now the Mount of Offence, then faintly glorified by the dying sun.

While they plied their hands, rubbing and wringing the clothes in the bowls, two other women came to them, each with an empty jar upon her shoulder.

"Peace to you," one of the new-comers said.

The laborers paused, sat up, wrung the water from their hands, and returned the salutation.

"It is nearly night—time to quit."

"There is no end to work," was the reply.

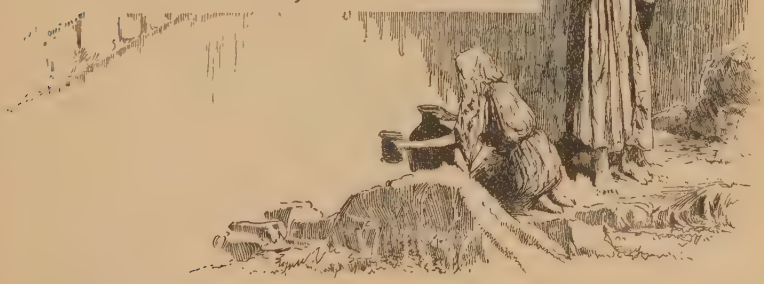
"But there is a time to rest, and—"

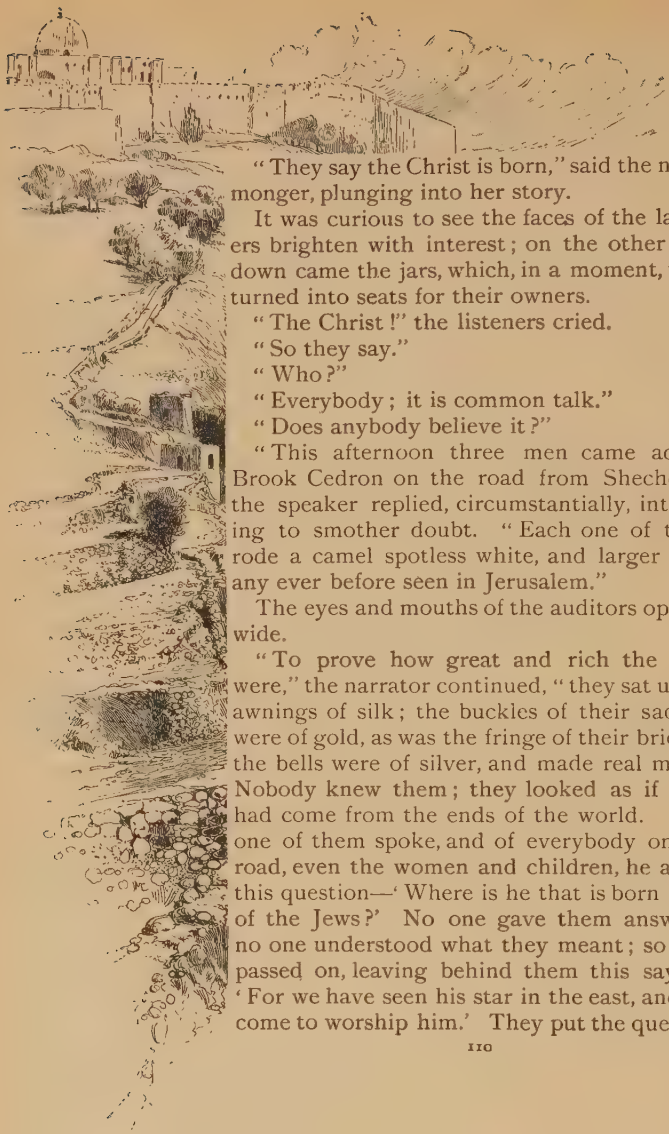
"To hear what may be passing," interposed another.

"What news have you?"

"Then you have not heard?"

"No."





"They say the Christ is born," said the newsmonger, plunging into her story.

It was curious to see the faces of the laborers brighten with interest; on the other side down came the jars, which, in a moment, were turned into seats for their owners.

"The Christ!" the listeners cried.

"So they say."

"Who?"

"Everybody; it is common talk."

"Does anybody believe it?"

"This afternoon three men came across Brook Cedron on the road from Shechem," the speaker replied, circumstantially, intending to smother doubt. "Each one of them rode a camel spotless white, and larger than any ever before seen in Jerusalem."

The eyes and mouths of the auditors opened wide.

"To prove how great and rich the men were," the narrator continued, "they sat under awnings of silk; the buckles of their saddles were of gold, as was the fringe of their bridles; the bells were of silver, and made real music. Nobody knew them; they looked as if they had come from the ends of the world. Only one of them spoke, and of everybody on the road, even the women and children, he asked this question—'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' No one gave them answer—no one understood what they meant; so they passed on, leaving behind them this saying: 'For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.' They put the question

to the Roman at the gate; and he, no wiser than the simple people on the road, sent them up to Herod."

"Where are they now?"

"At the khan. Hundreds have been to look at them already, and hundreds more are going."

"Who are they?"

"Nobody knows. They are said to be Persians — wise men who talk with the stars — prophets, it may be, like Elijah and Jeremiah."

"What do they mean by King of the Jews?"

"The Christ, and that he is just born."

One of the women laughed, and resumed her work, saying, "Well, when I see him I will believe."

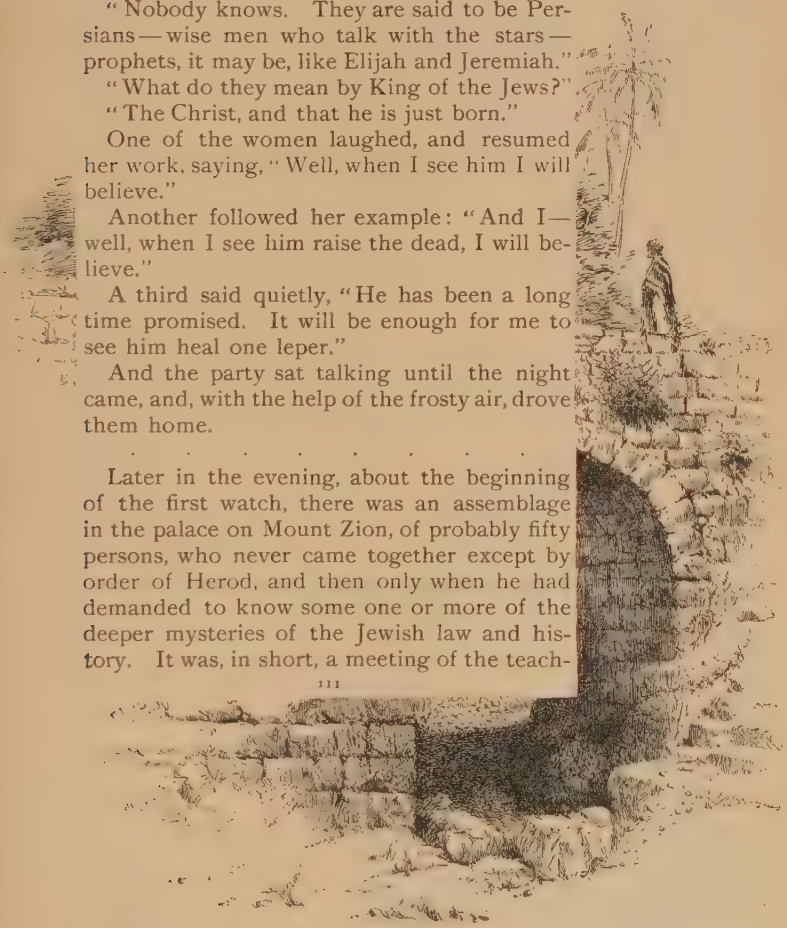
Another followed her example: "And I — well, when I see him raise the dead, I will believe."

A third said quietly, "He has been a long time promised. It will be enough for me to see him heal one leper."

And the party sat talking until the night came, and, with the help of the frosty air, drove them home.

. . . . . .

Later in the evening, about the beginning of the first watch, there was an assemblage in the palace on Mount Zion, of probably fifty persons, who never came together except by order of Herod, and then only when he had demanded to know some one or more of the deeper mysteries of the Jewish law and history. It was, in short, a meeting of the teach-



ers of the colleges, of the chief priests, and of the doctors most noted in the city for learning —the leaders of opinion, expounders of the different creeds; princes of the Sadducees; Pharisaic debaters; calm, soft-spoken, stoical philosophers of the Essene socialists.

The chamber in which the session was held belonged to one of the interior court-yards of the palace, and was quite large and Romanesque. The floor was tessellated with marble blocks; the walls, unbroken by a window, were frescoed in panels of saffron-yellow; a divan occupied the centre of the apartment, covered with cushions of bright-yellow cloth, and fashioned in form of the letter U, the opening towards the door-way; in the arch of the divan, or, as it were, in the bend of the letter, there was an immense bronze tripod, curiously inlaid with gold and silver, over which a chandelier dropped from the ceiling, having seven arms, each holding a lighted lamp. The divan and the lamp were purely Jewish.

The company sat upon the divan after the style of Orientals, in costume singularly uniform, except as to color. They were mostly men advanced in years; immense beards covered their faces; to their large noses were added the effects of large black eyes, deeply shaded by bold brows; their demeanor was grave, dignified, even patriarchal. In brief, their session was that of the Sanhedrim.

He who sat before the tripod, however, in the place which may be called the head of the divan, having all the rest of his associates on

his right and left, and, at the same time, before him, evidently president of the meeting, would have instantly absorbed the attention of a spectator. He had been cast in large mould, but was now shrunken and stooped to ghastliness; his white robe dropped from his shoulders in folds that gave no hint of muscle or anything but an angular skeleton. His hands, half-concealed by sleeves of silk, white and crimson striped, were clasped upon his knees. When he spoke, sometimes the first finger of the right hand extended tremulously; he seemed incapable of other gesture. But his head was a splendid dome. A few hairs, whiter than fine-drawn silver, fringed the base; over a broad, full-sphered skull the skin was drawn close, and shone in the light with positive brilliance; the temples were deep hollows, from which the forehead beetled like a wrinkled crag; the eyes were wan and dim; the nose was pinched; and all the lower face was muffled in a beard flowing and venerable as Aaron's. Such was Hillel the Babylonian! The line of prophets, long extinct in Israel, was now succeeded by a line of scholars, of whom he was first in learning—a prophet in all but the divine inspiration! At the age of one hundred and six, he was still Rector of the Great College.

On the table before him lay out-spread a roll or volume of parchment inscribed with Hebrew characters; behind him, in waiting, stood a page richly habited.

There had been discussion, but at this mo-

ment of introduction the company had reached a conclusion; each one was in an attitude of rest, and the venerable Hillel, without moving, called the page.

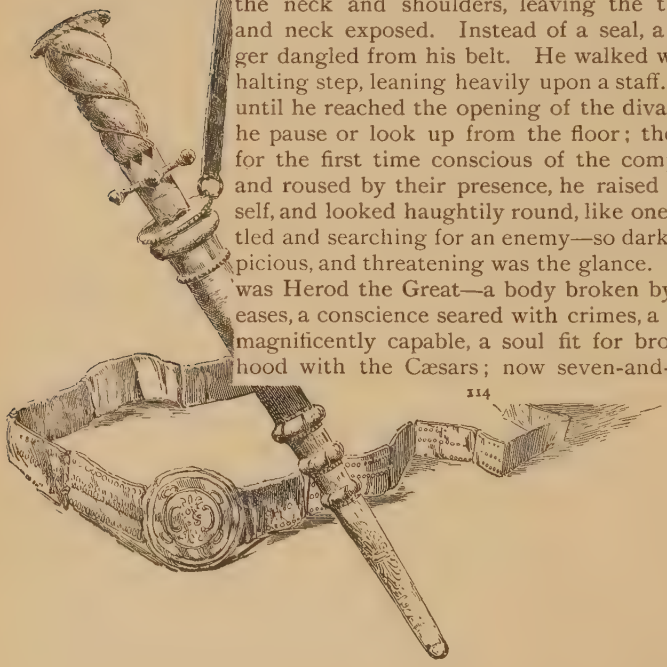
"Hist!"

The youth advanced respectfully.

"Go tell the king we are ready to give him answer."

The boy hurried away.

After a time two officers entered and stopped, one on each side the door; after them slowly followed a most striking personage—an old man clad in a purple robe bordered with scarlet, and girt to his waist by a band of gold linked so fine that it was pliable as leather; the latchets of his shoes sparkled with precious stones; a narrow crown wrought in filigree shone outside a tarbooshe of softest crimson plush, which, encasing his head, fell down the neck and shoulders, leaving the throat and neck exposed. Instead of a seal, a dagger dangled from his belt. He walked with a halting step, leaning heavily upon a staff. Not until he reached the opening of the divan did he pause or look up from the floor; then, as for the first time conscious of the company, and roused by their presence, he raised himself, and looked haughtily round, like one startled and searching for an enemy—so dark, suspicious, and threatening was the glance. Such was Herod the Great—a body broken by diseases, a conscience seared with crimes, a mind magnificently capable, a soul fit for brotherhood with the Cæsars; now seven-and-sixty



years old, but guarding his throne with a jealousy never so vigilant, a power never so despotic, and a cruelty never so inexorable.

There was a general movement on the part of the assemblage—a bending forward in salaam by the more aged, a rising-up by the more courtierly, followed by low genuflections, hands upon the beard or breast.

His observations taken, Herod moved on until at the tripod opposite the venerable Hillel, who met his cold glance with an inclination of the head, and a slight lifting of the hands.

"The answer!" said the king, with imperious simplicity, addressing Hillel, and planting his staff before him with both hands. "The answer!"

The eyes of the patriarch glowed mildly, and, raising his head, and looking the inquisitor full in the face, he answered, his associates giving him closest attention:

"With thee, O king, be the peace of God, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!"

His manner was that of invocation; changing it, he resumed:

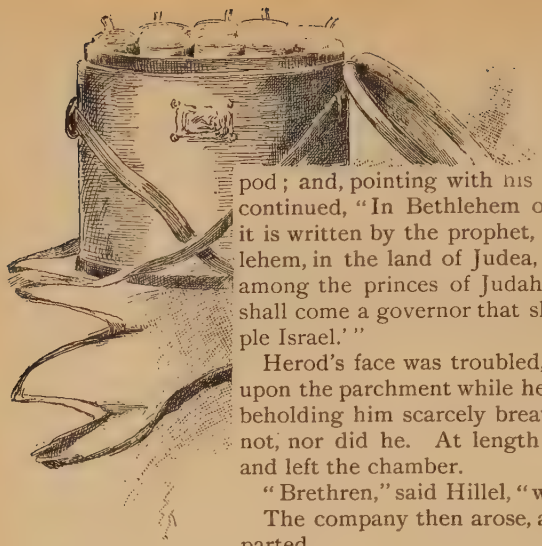
"Thou hast demanded of us where the Christ should be born."

The king bowed, though the evil eyes remained fixed upon the sage's face.

"That is the question."

"Then, O king, speaking for myself, and all my brethren here, not one dissenting, I say, in Bethlehem of Judea."

Hillel glanced at the parchment on the tri-



pod; and, pointing with his tremulous finger continued, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.'"

Herod's face was troubled, and his eyes fell upon the parchment while he thought. Those beholding him scarcely breathed; they spoke not, nor did he. At length he turned about and left the chamber.

"Brethren," said Hillel, "we are dismissed."

The company then arose, and in groups departed.

"Simeon," said Hillel again.

A man, quite fifty years old, but in the hearty prime of life, answered and came to him.

"Take up the sacred parchment, my son; roll it tenderly."

The order was obeyed.

"Now lend me thy arm; I will to the litter."

The strong man stooped; with his withered hands the old man took the offered support, and, rising, moved feebly to the door.

So departed the famous Rector, and Simeon, his son, who was to be his successor in wisdom, learning, and office.

. . . . . .

Yet later in the evening the wise men were lying in a lewen of the khan awake. The stones which served them as pillows raised their heads so they could look out of the open arch into the depths of the sky; and as they

watched the twinkling of the stars, they thought of the next manifestation. How would it come? What would it be? They were in Jerusalem at last; they had asked at the gate for Him they sought; they had borne witness of his birth; it remained only to find him; and as to that, they placed all trust in the Spirit. Men listening for the voice of God, or waiting a sign from Heaven, cannot sleep.

While they were in this condition, a man stepped in under the arch, darkening the lewen.

"Awake!" he said to them; "I bring you a message which will not be put off."

They all sat up.

"From whom?" asked the Egyptian.

"Herod the king."

Each one felt his spirit thrill.

"Are you not the steward of the khan?" Balthasar asked next.

"I am."

"What would the king with us?"

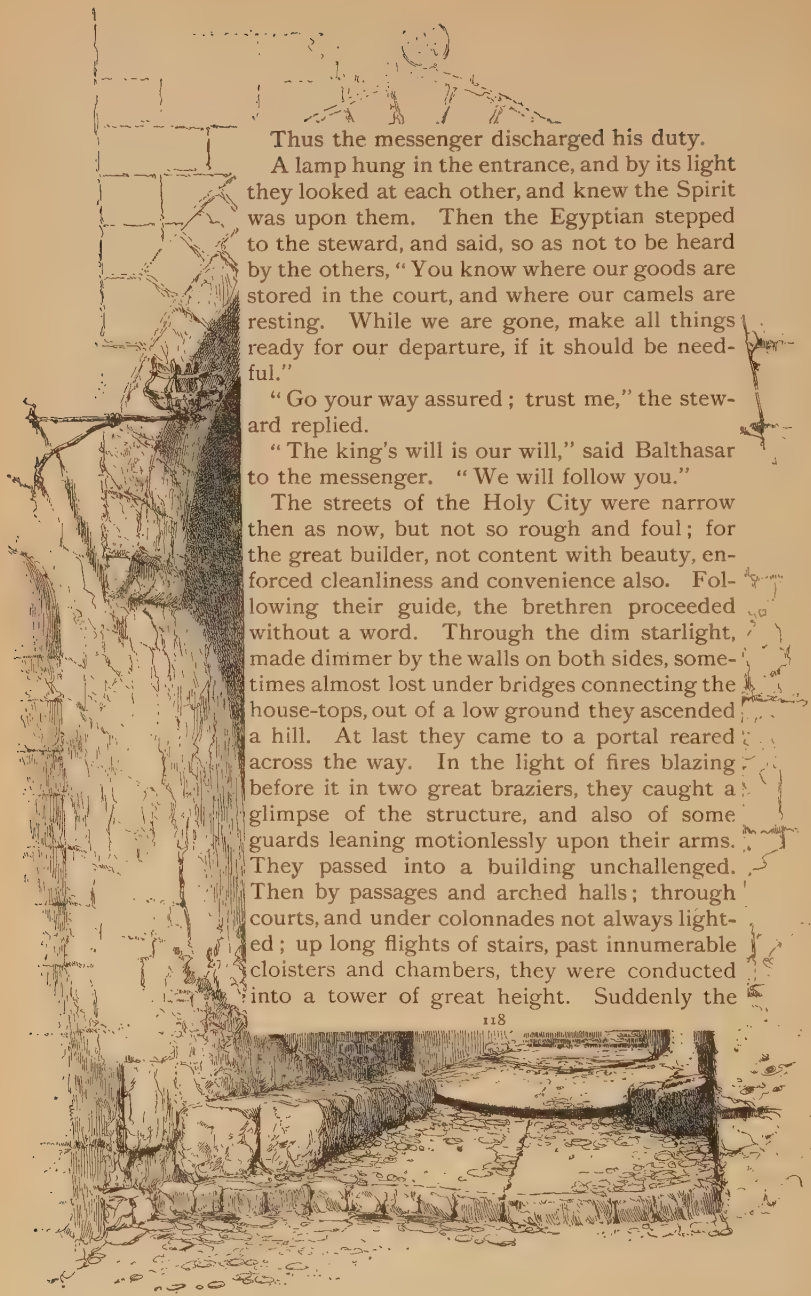
"His messenger is without; let him answer."

"Tell him, then, to abide our coming."

"You were right, O my brother!" said the Greek, when the steward was gone. "The question put to the people on the road, and to the guard at the gate, has given us quick notoriety. I am impatient; let us up quickly."

They arose, put on their sandals, girt their mantles about them, and went out.

"I salute you, and give you peace, and pray your pardon; but my master, the king, has sent me to invite you to the palace, where he would have speech with you privately."



Thus the messenger discharged his duty.

A lamp hung in the entrance, and by its light they looked at each other, and knew the Spirit was upon them. Then the Egyptian stepped to the steward, and said, so as not to be heard by the others, "You know where our goods are stored in the court, and where our camels are resting. While we are gone, make all things ready for our departure, if it should be needful."

"Go your way assured; trust me," the steward replied.

"The king's will is our will," said Balthasar to the messenger. "We will follow you."

The streets of the Holy City were narrow then as now, but not so rough and foul; for the great builder, not content with beauty, enforced cleanliness and convenience also. Following their guide, the brethren proceeded without a word. Through the dim starlight, made dimmer by the walls on both sides, sometimes almost lost under bridges connecting the house-tops, out of a low ground they ascended a hill. At last they came to a portal reared across the way. In the light of fires blazing before it in two great braziers, they caught a glimpse of the structure, and also of some guards leaning motionlessly upon their arms. They passed into a building unchallenged. Then by passages and arched halls; through courts, and under colonnades not always lighted; up long flights of stairs, past innumerable cloisters and chambers, they were conducted into a tower of great height. Suddenly the

guide halted, and, pointing through an open door, said to them,

"Enter. The king is there."

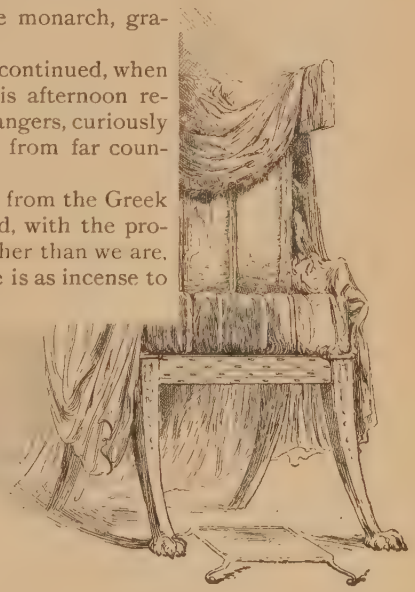
The air of the chamber was heavy with the perfume of sandal-wood, and all the appointments within were effeminately rich. Upon the floor, covering the central space, a tufted rug was spread, and upon that a throne was set. The visitors had but time, however, to catch a confused idea of the place—of carved and gilt ottomans and couches; of fans and jars and musical instruments; of golden candlesticks glittering in their own lights; of walls painted in the style of the voluptuous Grecian school, one look at which had made a Pharisee hide his head with holy horror. Herod, sitting upon the throne to receive them, clad as when at the conference with the doctors and lawyers, claimed all their minds.

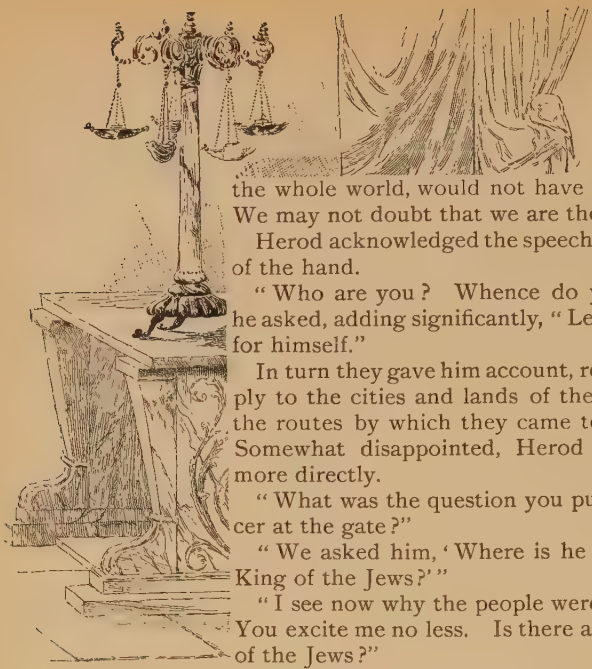
At the edge of the rug, to which they advanced uninvited, they prostrated themselves. The king touched a bell. An attendant came in, and placed three stools before the throne.

"Seat yourselves," said the monarch, graciously.

"From the North Gate," he continued, when they were at rest, "I had this afternoon report of the arrival of three strangers, curiously mounted, and appearing as if from far countries. Are you the men?"

The Egyptian took the sign from the Greek and the Hindoo, and answered, with the profoundest salaam, "Were we other than we are, the mighty Herod, whose fame is as incense to





the whole world, would not have sent for us. We may not doubt that we are the strangers."

Herod acknowledged the speech with a wave of the hand.

"Who are you? Whence do you come?" he asked, adding significantly, "Let each speak for himself."

In turn they gave him account, referring simply to the cities and lands of their birth, and the routes by which they came to Jerusalem. Somewhat disappointed, Herod plied them more directly.

"What was the question you put to the officer at the gate?"

"We asked him, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?'"

"I see now why the people were so curious. You excite me no less. Is there another King of the Jews?"

The Egyptian did not blanch.

"There is one newly born."

An expression of pain knit the dark face of the monarch, as if his mind were swept by a harrowing recollection.

"Not to me, not to me!" he exclaimed.

Possibly the accusing images of his murdered children flitted before him; recovering from the emotion, whatever it was, he asked, steadily, "Where is the new king?"

"That, O king, is what we would ask."

"You bring me a wonder—a riddle surpassing any of Solomon's," the inquisitor said next. "As you see, I am in the time of life when curiosity is as ungovernable as it was in child-

hood, when to trifle with it is cruelty. Tell me further, and I will honor you as kings honor each other. Give me all you know about the newly-born, and I will join you in the search for him; and when we have found him, I will do what you wish; I will bring him to Jerusalem, and train him in kingcraft; I will use my grace with Cæsar for his promotion and glory. Jealousy shall not come between us, so I swear. But tell me first how, so widely separated by seas and deserts, you all came to hear of him."

"I will tell you truly, O king."

"Speak on," said Herod.

Balthasar raised himself erect, and said, solemnly,

"There is an Almighty God."

Herod was visibly startled.

"He bade us come hither, promising that we should find the Redeemer of the World; that we should see and worship him, and bear witness that he was come; and, as a sign, we were each given to see a star. His Spirit stayed with us. O king, his Spirit is with us now!"

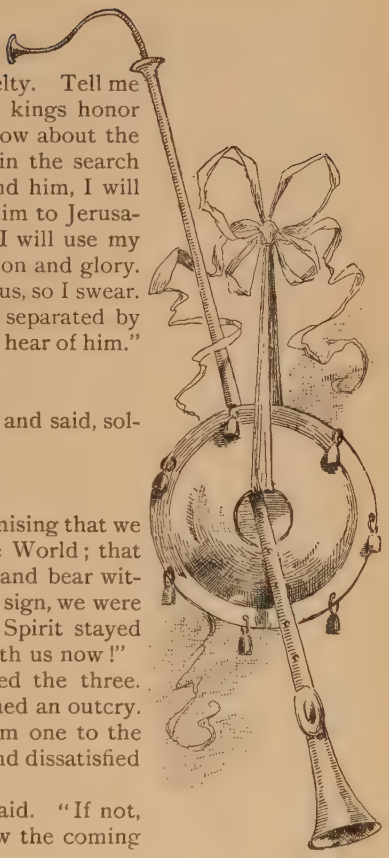
An overpowering feeling seized the three. The Greek with difficulty restrained an outcry. Herod's gaze darted quickly from one to the other; he was more suspicious and dissatisfied than before.

"You are mocking me," he said. "If not, tell me more. What is to follow the coming of the new king?"

"The salvation of men."

"From what?"

"Their wickedness."



"How?"

"By the divine agencies—Faith, Love, and Good Works."

"Then"—Herod paused, and from his look no man could have said with what feeling he continued—"you are the heralds of the Christ. Is that all?"

Balthasar bowed low.

"We are your servants, O king."

The monarch touched a bell, and the attendant appeared.

"Bring the gifts," the master said.

The attendant went out, but in a little while returned, and, kneeling before the guests, gave to each one an outer robe or mantle of scarlet and blue, and a girdle of gold. They acknowledged the honors with Eastern prostrations.

"A word further," said Herod, when the ceremony was ended. "To the officer of the gate, and but now to me, you spoke of seeing a star in the east."

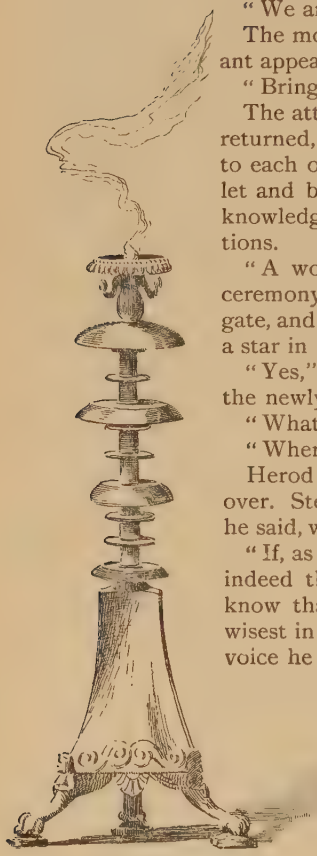
"Yes," said Balthasar, "his star, the star of the newly born."

"What time did it appear?"

"When we were bidden come hither."

Herod arose, signifying the audience was over. Stepping from the throne towards them, he said, with all graciousness,

"If, as I believe, O illustrious men, you are indeed the heralds of the Christ just born, know that I have this night consulted those wisest in things Jewish, and they say with one voice he should be born in Bethlehem of Ju-



dea. I say to you, go thither; go and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found him bring me word again, that I may come and worship him. To your going there shall be no let or hinderance. Peace be with you!"

And, folding his robe about him, he left the chamber.

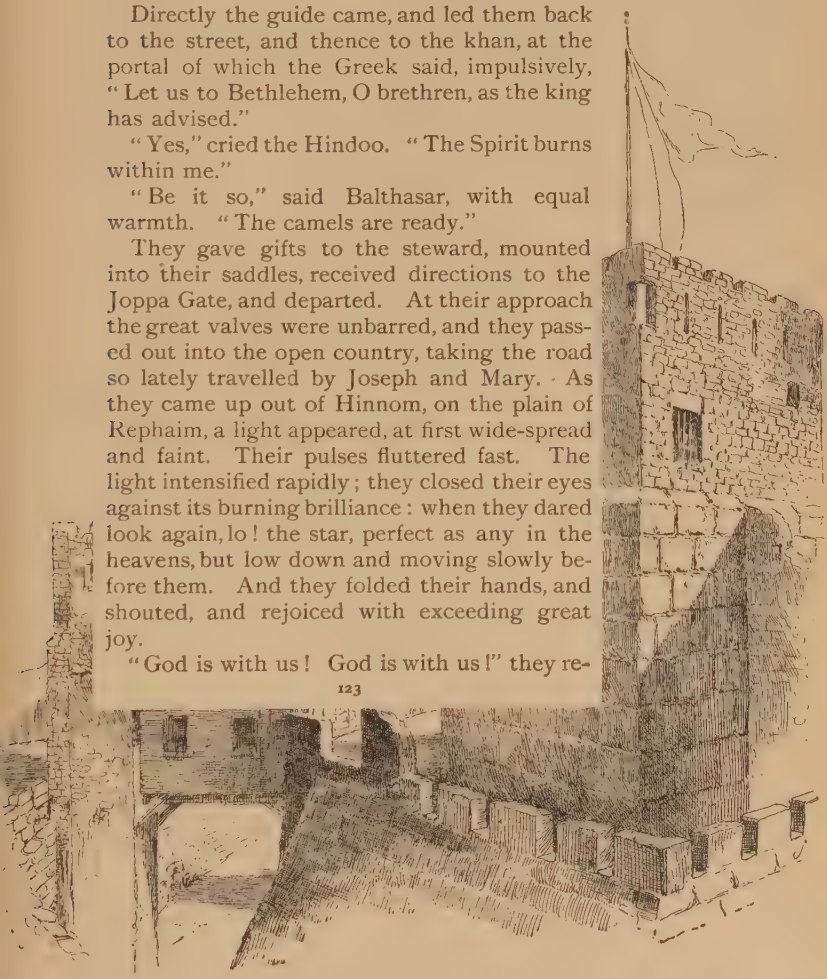
Directly the guide came, and led them back to the street, and thence to the khan, at the portal of which the Greek said, impulsively, "Let us to Bethlehem, O brethren, as the king has advised."

"Yes," cried the Hindoo. "The Spirit burns within me."

"Be it so," said Balthasar, with equal warmth. "The camels are ready."

They gave gifts to the steward, mounted into their saddles, received directions to the Joppa Gate, and departed. At their approach the great valves were unbarred, and they passed out into the open country, taking the road so lately travelled by Joseph and Mary. As they came up out of Hinnom, on the plain of Rephaim, a light appeared, at first wide-spread and faint. Their pulses fluttered fast. The light intensified rapidly; they closed their eyes against its burning brilliance: when they dared look again, lo! the star, perfect as any in the heavens, but low down and moving slowly before them. And they folded their hands, and shouted, and rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"God is with us! God is with us!" they re-

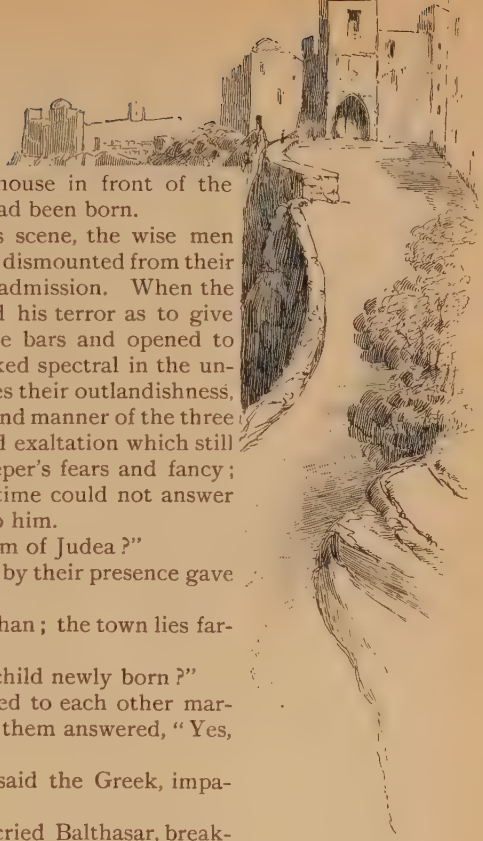


peated, in frequent cheer, all the way, until the star, rising out of the valley beyond Mar Elias, stood still over a house up on the slope of the hill near the town.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WISE MEN FIND THE CHILD

IT was now the beginning of the third watch, and at Bethlehem the morning was breaking over the mountains in the east, but so feebly that it was yet night in the valley. The watchman on the roof of the old khan, shivering in the chilly air, was listening for the first distinguishable sounds with which life, awakening, greets the dawn, when a light came moving up the hill towards the house. He thought it a torch in some one's hand; next moment he thought it a meteor; the brilliance grew, however, until it became a star. Sore afraid, he cried out, and brought everybody within the walls to the roof. The phenomenon, in eccentric motion, continued to approach; the rocks, trees, and roadway under it shone as in a glare of lightning; directly its brightness became blinding. The more timid of the beholders fell upon their knees, and prayed, with their faces hidden; the boldest, covering their eyes, crouched, and now and then snatched glances fearfully. Afterwhile the khan and everything thereabout lay under the intolerable radiance. Such as dared look beheld the star standing



still directly over the house in front of the cave where the Child had been born.

In the height of this scene, the wise men came up, and at the gate dismounted from their camels, and shouted for admission. When the steward so far mastered his terror as to give them heed, he drew the bars and opened to them. The camels looked spectral in the unnatural light, and, besides their outlandishness, there were in the faces and manner of the three visitors an eagerness and exaltation which still further excited the keeper's fears and fancy; he fell back, and for a time could not answer the question they put to him.

"Is not this Bethlehem of Judea?"

But others came, and by their presence gave him assurance.

"No, this is but the khan; the town lies farther on."

"Is there not here a child newly born?"

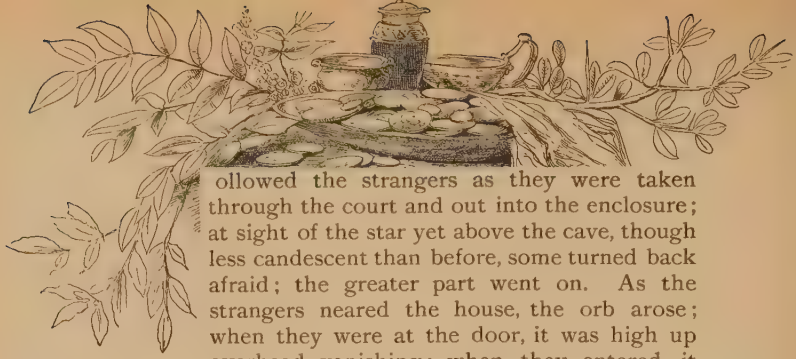
The by-standers turned to each other marvelling, though some of them answered, "Yes, yes."

"Show us to him!" said the Greek, impatiently.

"Show us to him!" cried Balthasar, breaking through his gravity; "for we have seen his star, even that which ye behold over the house, and are come to worship him."

The Hindoo clasped his hands, exclaiming, "God indeed lives! Make haste, make haste! The Saviour is found. Blessed, blessed are we above men!"

The people from the roof came down and



ollowed the strangers as they were taken through the court and out into the enclosure; at sight of the star yet above the cave, though less candescent than before, some turned back afraid; the greater part went on. As the strangers neared the house, the orb arose; when they were at the door, it was high up overhead vanishing; when they entered, it went out lost to sight. And to the witnesses of what then took place came a conviction that there was a divine relation between the star and the strangers, which extended also to at least some of the occupants of the cave. When the door was opened, they crowded in.

The apartment was lighted by a lantern enough to enable the strangers to find the mother, and the child awake in her lap.

"Is the child thine?" asked Balthasar of Mary.

And she who had kept all the things in the least affecting the little one, and pondered them in her heart, held it up in the light, saying,

"He is my son!"

And they fell down and worshipped him.

They saw the child was as other children: about its head was neither nimbus nor material crown; its lips opened not in speech; if it heard their expressions of joy, their invocations, their prayers, it made no sign whatever, but, baby-like, looked longer at the flame in the lantern than at them.

In a little while they arose, and, returning to the camels, brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and laid them before the child,

abating nothing of their worshipful speeches; of which no part is given, for the thoughtful know that the pure worship of the pure heart was then what it is now, and has always been, an inspired song.

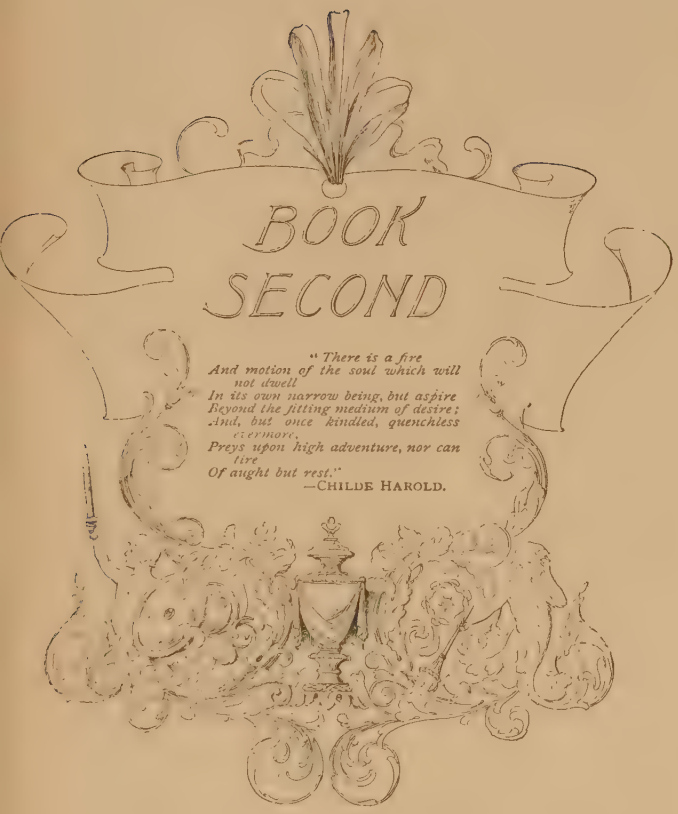
And this was the Saviour they had come so far to find!

Yet they worshipped without a doubt.

Why?

Their faith rested upon the signs sent them by him whom we have since come to know as the Father; and they were of the kind to whom his promises were so all-sufficient that they asked nothing about his ways. Few there were who had seen the signs and heard the promises — the Mother and Joseph, the shepherds, and the Three — yet they all believed alike; that is to say, in this period of the plan of salvation, God was all and the Child nothing. But look forward, O reader! A time will come when the signs will all proceed from the Son. Happy they who then believe in him!

Let us wait that period.



BOOK SECOND

"There is a fire
And motion of the soul which will not dwell
In its own narrow being, but aspire
Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest."

—CHILDE HAROLD.

TOMBS OF THE KINGS, JERUSALEM

CHAPTER I

JERUSALEM UNDER THE ROMANS

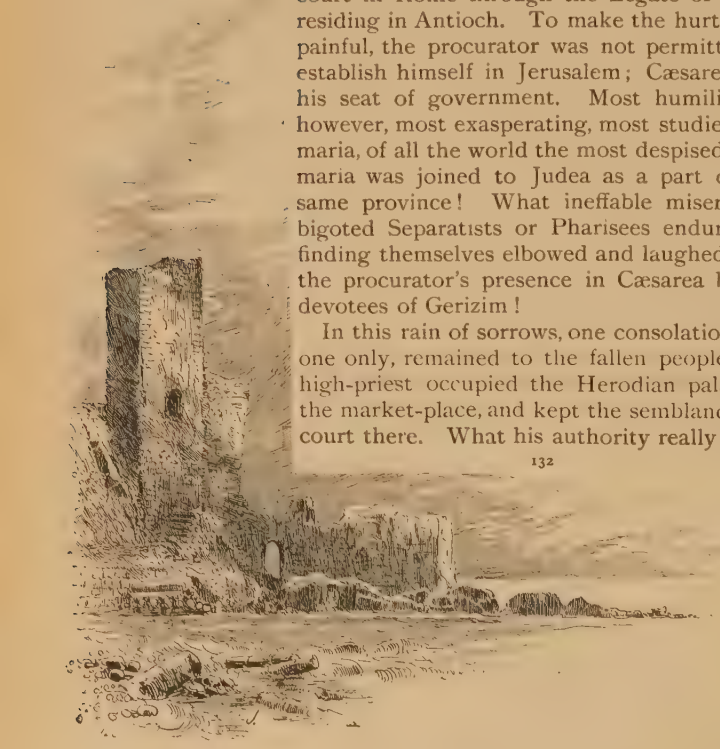
It is necessary now to carry the reader forward twenty-one years, to the beginning of the administration of Valerius Gratus, the fourth imperial governor of Judea—a period which will be remembered as rent by political agitations in Jerusalem, if, indeed, it be not the precise time of the opening of the final quarrel between the Jew and the Roman.

In the interval Judea had been subjected to changes affecting her in many ways, but in nothing so much as her political status. Herod the Great died within one year after the birth of the Child—died so miserably that the Christian world had reason to believe him overtaken by the divine wrath. Like all great rulers who spend their lives in perfecting the power they create, he dreamed of transmitting his throne and crown—of being the founder of a dynasty. With that intent, he left a will dividing his territories between his three sons, Antipas, Philip, and Archelaus, of whom the last was appointed to succeed to the title. The testament was necessarily referred to Augustus, the emperor, who ratified all its provisions with one exception: he withheld from Archelaus the title of king until he proved his capacity and loyalty; in lieu thereof, he

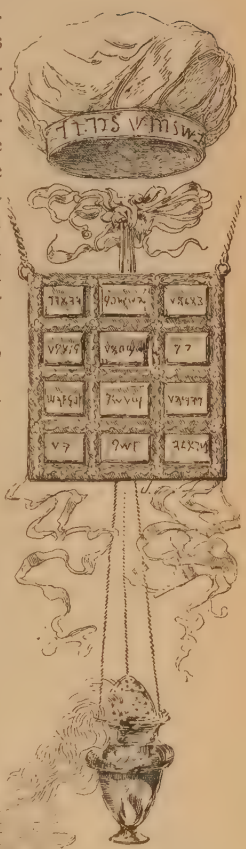
created him ethnarch, and as such permitted him to govern nine years, when, for misconduct and inability to stay the turbulent elements that grew and strengthened around him, he was sent into Gaul as an exile.

Cæsar was not content with deposing Archelaus; he struck the people of Jerusalem in a manner that touched their pride, and keenly wounded the sensibilities of the haughty habitués of the Temple. He reduced Judea to a Roman province, and annexed it to the prefecture of Syria. So, instead of a king ruling royally from the palace left by Herod on Mount Zion, the city fell into the hands of an officer of the second grade, an appointee called procurator, who communicated with the court in Rome through the Legate of Syria, residing in Antioch. To make the hurt more painful, the procurator was not permitted to establish himself in Jerusalem; Cæsarea was his seat of government. Most humiliating, however, most exasperating, most studied, Samaria, of all the world the most despised—Samaria was joined to Judea as a part of the same province! What ineffable misery the bigoted Separatists or Pharisees endured at finding themselves elbowed and laughed at in the procurator's presence in Cæsarea by the devotees of Gerizim!

In this rain of sorrows, one consolation, and one only, remained to the fallen people: the high-priest occupied the Herodian palace in the market-place, and kept the semblance of a court there. What his authority really was is

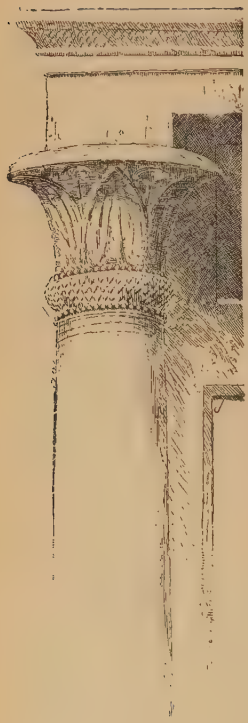


a matter of easy estimate. Judgment of life and death was retained by the procurator. Justice was administered in the name and according to the decretals of Rome. Yet more significant, the royal house was jointly occupied by the imperial exciseman, and all his corps of assistants, registrars, collectors, publicans, informers, and spies. Still, to the dreamers of liberty to come, there was a certain satisfaction in the fact that the chief ruler in the palace was a Jew. His mere presence there day after day kept them reminded of the covenants and promises of the prophets, and the ages when Jehovah governed the tribes through the sons of Aaron; it was to them a certain sign that he had not abandoned them: so their hopes lived, and served their patience, and helped them wait grimly the son of Judah who was to rule Israel.



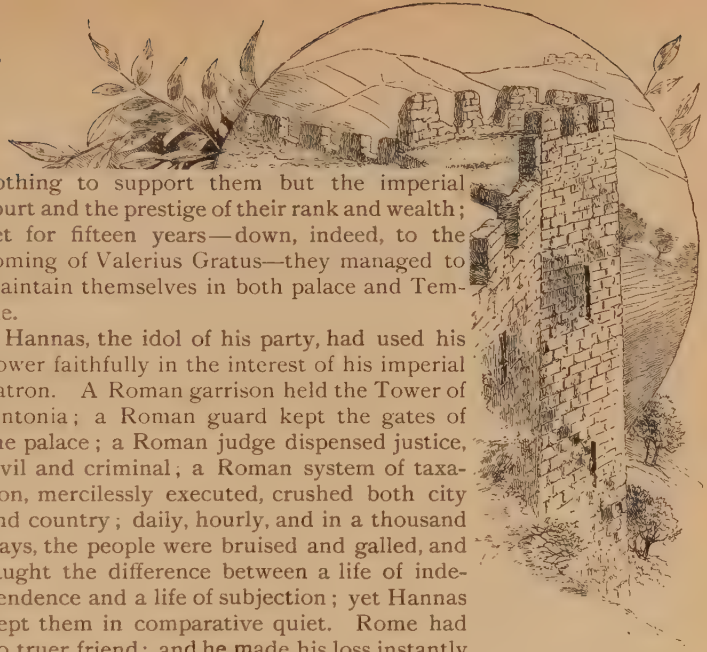
Judea had been a Roman province eighty years and more—ample time for the Cæsars to study the idiosyncrasies of the people—time enough, at least, to learn that the Jew, with all his pride, could be quietly governed if his religion were respected. Proceeding upon that policy, the predecessors of Gratus had carefully abstained from interfering with any of the sacred observances of their subjects. But he chose a different course: almost his first official act was to expel Hannas from the high-priesthood, and give the place to Ishmael, son of Fabus.

Whether the act was directed by Augustus, or proceeded from Gratus himself, its impolicy



became speedily apparent. The reader shall be spared a chapter on Jewish politics; a few words upon the subject, however, are essential to such as may follow the succeeding narration critically. At this time, leaving origin out of view, there were in Judea the party of the nobles and the Separatist or popular party. Upon Herod's death, the two united against Archelaus; from temple to palace, from Jerusalem to Rome, they fought him sometimes with intrigue, sometimes with the actual weapons of war. More than once the holy cloisters on Moriah resounded with the cries of fighting men. Finally, they drove him into exile. Meantime throughout this struggle the allies had their diverse objects in view. The nobles hated Joazar, the high-priest; the Separatists, on the other hand, were his zealous adherents. When Herod's settlement went down with Archelaus, Joazar shared the fall. Hannas, the son of Seth, was selected by the nobles to fill the great office; thereupon the allies divided. The induction of the Sethian brought them face to face in fierce hostility.

In the course of the struggle with the unfortunate ethnarch, the nobles had found it expedient to attach themselves to Rome. Discerning that when the existing settlement was broken up some form of government must needs follow, they suggested the conversion of Judea into a province. The fact furnished the Separatists an additional cause for attack; and, when Samaria was made part of the province, the nobles sank into a minority, with



nothing to support them but the imperial court and the prestige of their rank and wealth; yet for fifteen years—down, indeed, to the coming of Valerius Gratus—they managed to maintain themselves in both palace and Temple.

Hannas, the idol of his party, had used his power faithfully in the interest of his imperial patron. A Roman garrison held the Tower of Antonia; a Roman guard kept the gates of the palace; a Roman judge dispensed justice, civil and criminal; a Roman system of taxation, mercilessly executed, crushed both city and country; daily, hourly, and in a thousand ways, the people were bruised and galled, and taught the difference between a life of independence and a life of subjection; yet Hannas kept them in comparative quiet. Rome had no truer friend; and he made his loss instantly felt. Delivering his vestments to Ishmael, the new appointee, he walked from the courts of the Temple into the councils of the Separatists, and became the head of a new combination, Bethusian and Sethian.

Gratus, the procurator, left thus without a party, saw the fires which, in the fifteen years, had sunk into sodden smoke begin to glow with returning life. A month after Ishmael took the office, the Roman found it necessary to visit him in Jerusalem. When from the walls, hooting and hissing him, the Jews beheld his guard enter the north gate of the city and march to the Tower of Antonia, they understood the real purpose of the visit—a

full cohort of legionaries was added to the former garrison, and the keys of their yoke could now be tightened with impunity. If the procurator deemed it important to make an example, alas for the first offender!

CHAPTER II

BEN-HUR AND MESSALA

WITH the foregoing explanation in mind, the reader is invited to look into one of the gardens of the palace on Mount Zion. The time was noonday in the middle of July, when the heat of summer was at its highest.

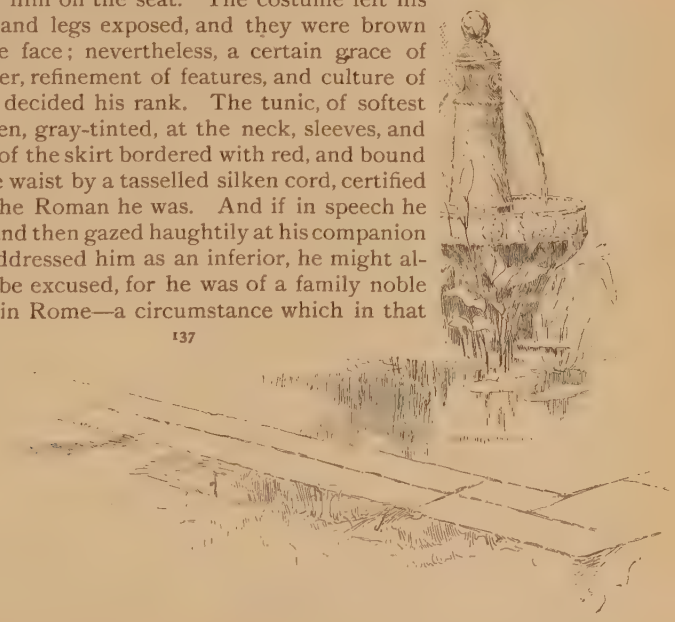
The garden was bounded on every side by buildings, which in places arose two stories, with verandas shading the doors and windows of the lower story, while retreating galleries, guarded by strong balustrades, adorned and protected the upper. Here and there, moreover, the structures fell into what appeared low colonnades, permitting the passage of such winds as chanced to blow, and allowing other parts of the house to be seen, the better to realize its magnitude and beauty. The arrangement of the ground was equally pleasant to the eye. There were walks, and patches of grass and shrubbery, and a few large trees, rare specimens of the palm, grouped with the carob, apricot, and walnut. In all directions the grade sloped gently from the centre, where there was a reservoir, or deep marble basin,

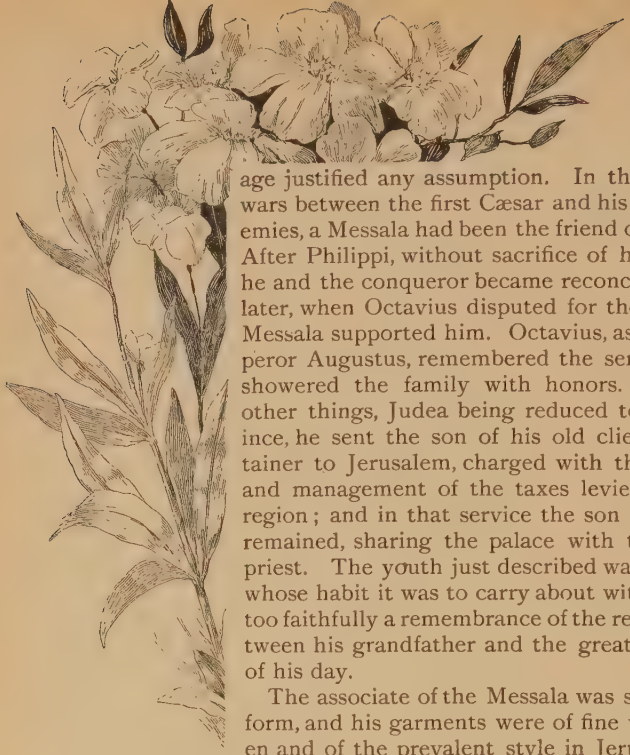
broken at intervals by little gates which, when raised, emptied the water into sluices bordering the walks—a cunning device for the rescue of the place from the aridity too prevalent elsewhere in the region.

Not far from the fountain, there was a small pool of clear water nourishing a clump of cane and oleander, such as grow on the Jordan and down by the Dead Sea. Between the clump and the pool, unmindful of the sun shining full upon them in the breathless air, two boys, one about nineteen, the other seventeen, sat engaged in earnest conversation.

They were both handsome, and, at first glance, would have been pronounced brothers. Both had hair and eyes black; their faces were deeply browned; and, sitting, they seemed of a size proper for the difference in their ages.

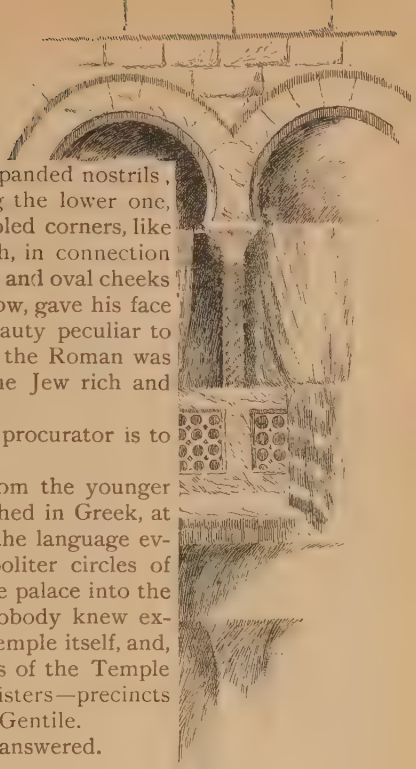
The elder was bareheaded. A loose tunic, dropping to the knees, was his attire complete, except sandals and a light-blue mantle spread under him on the seat. The costume left his arms and legs exposed, and they were brown as the face; nevertheless, a certain grace of manner, refinement of features, and culture of voice decided his rank. The tunic, of softest woollen, gray-tinted, at the neck, sleeves, and edge of the skirt bordered with red, and bound to the waist by a tasselled silken cord, certified him the Roman he was. And if in speech he now and then gazed haughtily at his companion and addressed him as an inferior, he might almost be excused, for he was of a family noble even in Rome—a circumstance which in that





age justified any assumption. In the terrible wars between the first Cæsar and his great enemies, a Messala had been the friend of Brutus. After Philippi, without sacrifice of his honor, he and the conqueror became reconciled. Yet later, when Octavius disputed for the empire, Messala supported him. Octavius, as the Emperor Augustus, remembered the service, and showered the family with honors. Among other things, Judea being reduced to a province, he sent the son of his old client or retainer to Jerusalem, charged with the receipt and management of the taxes levied in that region; and in that service the son had since remained, sharing the palace with the high-priest. The youth just described was his son, whose habit it was to carry about with him all too faithfully a remembrance of the relation between his grandfather and the great Romans of his day.

The associate of the Messala was slighter in form, and his garments were of fine white linen and of the prevalent style in Jerusalem; a cloth covered his head, held by a yellow cord, and arranged so as to fall away from the forehead down low over the back of the neck. An observer skilled in the distinctions of race, and studying his features more than his costume, would have soon discovered him to be of Jewish descent. The forehead of the Roman was high and narrow, his nose sharp and aquiline, while his lips were thin and straight, and his eyes cold and close under the brows. The front of the Israelite, on the other hand, was low and



broad; his nose long, with expanded nostrils, his upper lip, slightly shading the lower one, short and curving to the dimpled corners, like a Cupid's bow, points which, in connection with the round chin, full eyes, and oval cheeks reddened with a wine-like glow, gave his face the softness, strength, and beauty peculiar to his race. The comeliness of the Roman was severe and chaste, that of the Jew rich and voluptuous.

"Did you not say the new procurator is to arrive to-morrow?"

The question proceeded from the younger of the friends, and was couched in Greek, at the time, singularly enough, the language everywhere prevalent in the politer circles of Judea, having passed from the palace into the camp and college, thence, nobody knew exactly when or how, into the Temple itself, and, for that matter, into precincts of the Temple far beyond the gates and cloisters—precincts of a sanctity intolerable for a Gentile.

"Yes, to-morrow," Messala answered.

"Who told you?"

"I heard Ishmael, the new governor in the palace—you call him high-priest—tell my father so last night. The news had been more credible, I grant you, coming from an Egyptian, who is of a race that has forgotten what truth is, or even from an Idumæan, whose people never knew what truth was, but, to make quite certain, I saw a centurion from the Tower this morning, and he told me preparations were going on for the reception, that the

armorers were furbishing the helmets and shields, and regilding the eagles and globes; and that apartments long unused were being cleansed and aired as if for an addition to the garrison — the body-guard, probably, of the great man."

A perfect idea of the manner in which the answer was given cannot be conveyed, as its fine points continually escape the power behind the pen. The reader's fancy must come to his aid, and for that he must be reminded that reverence as a quality of the Roman mind was fast breaking down, or, rather, it was becoming unfashionable. The old religion had nearly ceased to be a faith, at most it was a mere habit of thought and expression, cherished principally by the priests who found service in the Temple profitable, and the poets who, in the turn of their verses, could not dispense with the familiar deities · there are singers of this age who are similarly given. As philosophy was taking the place of religion, satire was fast substituting reverence; insomuch that in Latin opinion it was to every speech, even to the little diatribes of conversation, as salt to viands, or aroma to wine. The young Messala, educated in Rome, but lately returned, had caught the habit and manner · the scarce perceptible movement of the outer corner of the lower eyelid, the decided curl of the corresponding nostril, and a languid utterance affected as the best vehicle to convey the idea of general indifference, but more particularly because of the opportunities it afforded for

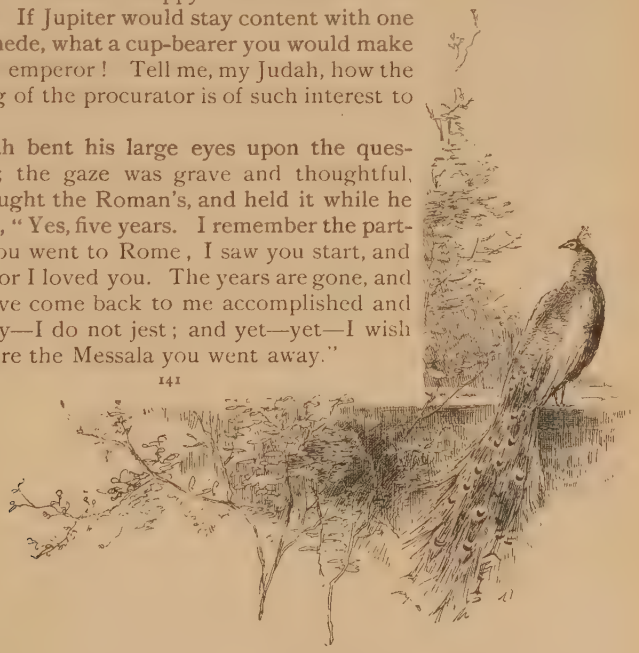
certain rhetorical pauses thought to be of prime importance to enable the listener to take the happy conceit or receive the virus of the stinging epigram. Such a stop occurred in the answer just given, at the end of the allusion to the Egyptian and Idumæan. The color in the Jewish lad's cheeks deepened, for he remained silent, looking absently into the depths of the pool.

"Our farewell took place in this garden. 'The peace of the Lord go with you!'—your last words. 'The gods keep you!' I said. Do you remember? How many years have passed since then?"

"Five," answered the Jew, gazing into the water.

"Well, you have reason to be thankful to—whom shall I say? The gods? No matter. You have grown handsome, the Greeks would call you beautiful—happy achievement of the years! If Jupiter would stay content with one Ganymede, what a cup-bearer you would make for the emperor! Tell me, my Judah, how the coming of the procurator is of such interest to you."

Judah bent his large eyes upon the questioner; the gaze was grave and thoughtful, and caught the Roman's, and held it while he replied, "Yes, five years. I remember the parting; you went to Rome, I saw you start, and cried, for I loved you. The years are gone, and you have come back to me accomplished and princely—I do not jest; and yet—yet—I wish you were the Messala you went away."



The fine nostril of the satirist stirred, and he put on a longer drawl as he said, "No, no; not a Ganymede—an oracle, my Judah. A few lessons from my teacher of rhetoric hard by the Forum—I will give you a letter to him when you become wise enough to accept a suggestion which I am reminded to make you —a little practice of the art of mystery, and Delphi will receive you as Apollo himself. At the sound of your solemn voice, the Pythia will come down to you with her crown. Seriously, O my friend, in what am I not the Messala I went away? I once heard the greatest logician in the world. His subject was Disputation. One saying I remember—'Understand your antagonist before you answer him.' Let me understand you."

The lad reddened under the cynical look to which he was subjected, yet he replied, firmly, "You have availed yourself, I see, of your opportunities; from your teachers you have brought away much knowledge and many graces. You talk with the ease of a master, yet your speech carries a sting. My Messala, when he went away, had no poison in his nature; not for the world would he have hurt the feelings of a friend."

The Roman smiled as if complimented, and raised his patrician head a toss higher.

"O my solemn Judah, we are not at Dodona or Pytho. Drop the oracular, and be plain. Wherein have I hurt you?"

The other drew a long breath, and said, pulling at the cord about his waist, "In the five

years, I, too, have learned somewhat. Hillel may not be the equal of the logician you heard, and Simeon and Shammai are, no doubt, inferior to your master hard by the Forum. Their learning goes not out into forbidden paths; those who sit at their feet arise enriched simply with knowledge of God, the law, and Israel; and the effect is love and reverence for everything that pertains to them. Attendance at the Great College, and study of what I heard there, have taught me that Judea is not as she used to be. I know the space that lies between an independent kingdom and the petty province Judea is. I were meaner, viler, than a Samaritan not to resent the degradation of my country. Ishmael is not lawfully high-priest, and he cannot be while the noble Hannas lives; yet he is a Levite; one of the devoted who for thousands of years have acceptably served the Lord God of our faith and worship. His—"

Messala broke in upon him with a biting laugh.

"Oh, I understand you now. Ishmael, you say, is a usurper, yet to believe an Idumæan sooner than Ishmael is to sting like an adder. By the drunken son of Semele, what it is to be a Jew! All men and things, even heaven and earth, change; but a Jew never. To him there is no backward, no forward; he is what his ancestor was in the beginning. In this sand I draw you a circle—there! Now tell me what more a Jew's life is? Round and round. Abraham here, Isaac and Jacob yonder, God

in the middle. And the circle—by the master of all thunders! the circle is too large. I draw it again—". He stopped, put his thumb upon the ground, and swept the fingers about it. "See, the thumb-spot is the Temple, the finger-lines Judea. Outside the little space is there nothing of value? The arts! Herod was a builder; therefore he is accursed. Painting, sculpture! to look upon them is sin. Poetry you make fast to your altars. Except in the synagogue, who of you attempts eloquence? In war all you conquer in the six days you lose on the seventh. Such your life and limit; who shall say no if I laugh at you? Satisfied with the worship of such a people, what is your God to our Roman Jove, who lends us his eagles that we may compass the universe with our arms? Hillel, Simeon, Shammai, Abtalion — what are they to the masters who teach that everything is worth knowing that can be known?"

The Jew arose, his face much flushed.

"No, no; keep your place, my Judah, keep your place," Messala cried, extending his hand.

"You mock me."

"Listen a little further. Directly"—the Roman smiled derisively—"directly Jupiter and his whole family, Greek and Latin, will come to me, as is their habit, and make an end of serious speech. I am mindful of your goodness in walking from the old house of your fathers to welcome me back and renew the love of our childhood—if we can. 'Go,' said my teacher, in his last lecture—'Go, and,

to make your lives great, remember Mars reigns and Eros has found his eyes.' He meant love is nothing, war everything. It is so in Rome. Marriage is the first step to divorce. Virtue is a tradesman's jewel. Cleopatra, dying, bequeathed her arts, and is avenged; she has a successor in every Roman's house. The world is going the same way; so, as to our future, down Eros, up Mars! I am to be a soldier; and you, O my Judah, I pity you; what can you be?"

The Jew moved nearer the pool; Messala's drawl deepened.

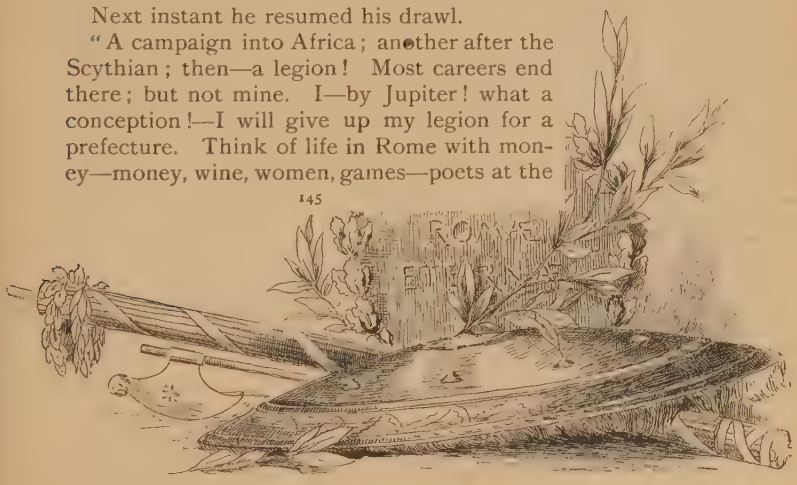
"Yes, I pity you, my fine Judah. From the college to the synagogue; then to the Temple; then—oh, a crowning glory!—the seat in the Sanhedrim. A life without opportunities; the gods help you! But I—"

Judah looked at him in time to see the flush of pride that kindled in his haughty face as he went on.

"But I—ah, the world is not all conquered. The sea has islands unseen. In the north there are nations yet unvisited. The glory of completing Alexander's march to the Far East remains to some one. See what possibilities lie before a Roman."

Next instant he resumed his drawl.

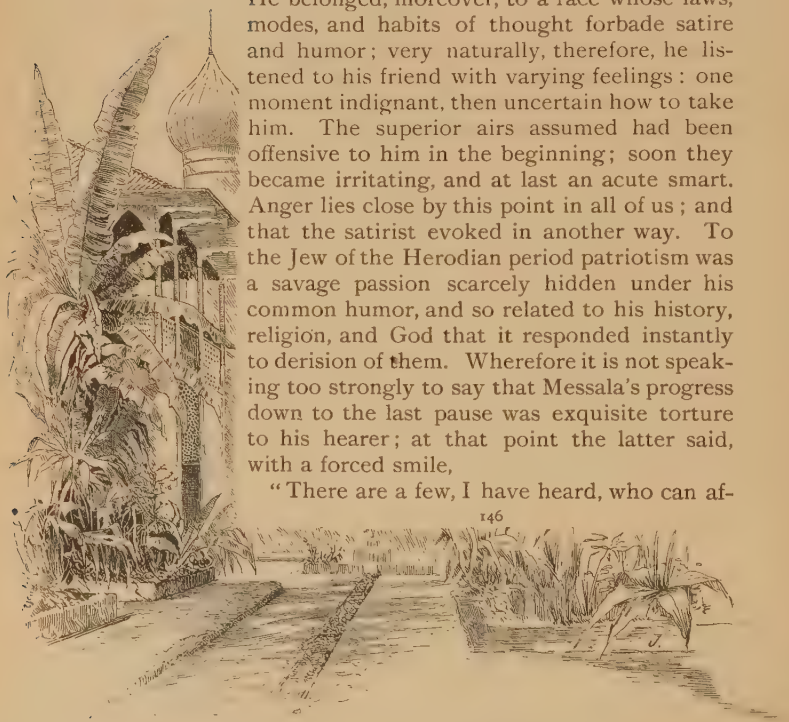
"A campaign into Africa; another after the Scythian; then—a legion! Most careers end there; but not mine. I—by Jupiter! what a conception!—I will give up my legion for a prefecture. Think of life in Rome with money—money, wine, women, games—poets at the



banquet, intrigues in the court, dice all the year round. Such a rounding of life may be—a fat prefecture, and it is mine. O my Judah, here is Syria! Judea is rich; Antioch a capital for the gods. I will succeed Cyrenius, and you—shall share my fortune."

The sophists and rhetoricians who thronged the public resorts of Rome, almost monopolizing the business of teaching her patrician youth, might have approved these sayings of Messala, for they were all in the popular vein; to the young Jew, however, they were new, and unlike the solemn style of discourse and conversation to which he was accustomed. He belonged, moreover, to a race whose laws, modes, and habits of thought forbade satire and humor; very naturally, therefore, he listened to his friend with varying feelings: one moment indignant, then uncertain how to take him. The superior airs assumed had been offensive to him in the beginning; soon they became irritating, and at last an acute smart. Anger lies close by this point in all of us; and that the satirist evoked in another way. To the Jew of the Herodian period patriotism was a savage passion scarcely hidden under his common humor, and so related to his history, religion, and God that it responded instantly to derision of them. Wherefore it is not speaking too strongly to say that Messala's progress down to the last pause was exquisite torture to his hearer; at that point the latter said, with a forced smile,

"There are a few, I have heard, who can af-



ford to make a jest of their future; you convince me, O my Messala, that I am not one of them."

The Roman studied him; then replied, "Why not the truth in a jest as well as a parable? The great Fulvia went fishing the other day; she caught more than all the company besides. They said it was because the barb of her hook was covered with gold."

"Then you were not merely jesting?"

"My Judah, I see I did not offer you enough," the Roman answered, quickly, his eyes sparkling. "When I am prefect, with Judea to enrich me, I—will make you high-priest."

The Jew turned off angrily.

"Do not leave me," said Messala.

The other stopped irresolute.

"Gods, Judah, how hot the sun shines!" cried the patrician, observing his perplexity. "Let us seek a shade."

Judah answered, coldly,

"We had better part. I wish I had not come. I sought a friend and find a—"

"Roman," said Messala, quickly.

The hands of the Jew clinched, but controlling himself again, he started off. Messala arose, and, taking the mantle from the bench, flung it over his shoulder, and followed after; when he gained his side, he put his hand upon his shoulder and walked with him.

"This is the way—my hand thus—we used to walk when we were children. Let us keep it as far as the gate."

Apparently Messala was trying to be serious

and kind, though he could not rid his countenance of the habitual satirical expression. Judah permitted the familiarity.

"You are a boy; I am a man; let me talk like one."

The complacency of the Roman was superb. Mentor lecturing the young Telemachus could not have been more at ease.

"Do you believe in the Parcæ? Ah, I forgot, you are a Sadducee: the Essenes are your sensible people; they believe in the sisters. So do I. How everlastingly the three are in the way of our doing what we please! I sit down scheming. I run paths here and there. Perpol! Just when I am reaching to take the world in hand, I hear behind me the grinding of scissors. I look, and there she is, the accursed Atropos! But, my Judah, why did you get mad when I spoke of succeeding old Cyrenius? You thought I meant to enrich myself plundering your Judea. Suppose so; it is what some Roman will do. Why not I?"

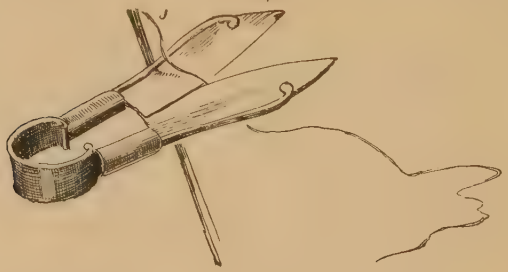
Judah shortened his step.

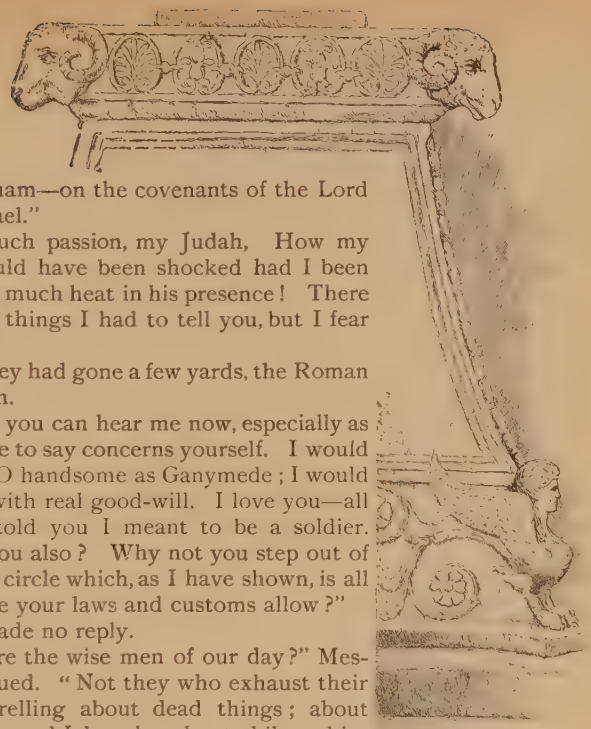
"There have been strangers in mastery of Judea before the Roman," he said, with lifted hand. "Where are they, Messala? She has outlived them all. What has been will be again."

Messala put on his drawl.

"The Parcæ have believers outside the Essenes. Welcome, Judah, welcome to the faith!"

"No, Messala, count me not with them. My faith rests on the rock which was the foundation of the faith of my fathers back further





than Abraham—on the covenants of the Lord God of Israel."

"Too much passion, my Judah, How my master would have been shocked had I been guilty of so much heat in his presence! There were other things I had to tell you, but I fear to now."

When they had gone a few yards, the Roman spoke again.

"I think you can hear me now, especially as what I have to say concerns yourself. I would serve you, O handsome as Ganymede; I would serve you with real good-will. I love you—all I can. I told you I meant to be a soldier. Why not you also? Why not you step out of the narrow circle which, as I have shown, is all of noble life your laws and customs allow?"

Judah made no reply.

"Who are the wise men of our day?" Messala continued. "Not they who exhaust their years quarrelling about dead things; about Baals, Joves, and Jehovahs; about philosophies and religions. Give me one great name, O Judah; I care not where you go to find it—to Rome, Egypt, the East, or here in Jerusalem—Pluto take me if it belong not to a man who wrought his fame out of the material furnished him by the present; holding nothing sacred that did not contribute to the end, scorning nothing that did! How was it with Herod? How with the Maccabees? How with the first and second Cæsars? Imitate them. Begin now. At hand see—Rome, as ready to help you as she was the Idumæan Antipater."

The Jewish lad trembled with rage; and, as the garden-gate was close by, he quickened his steps, eager to escape.

"O Rome, Rome!" he muttered.

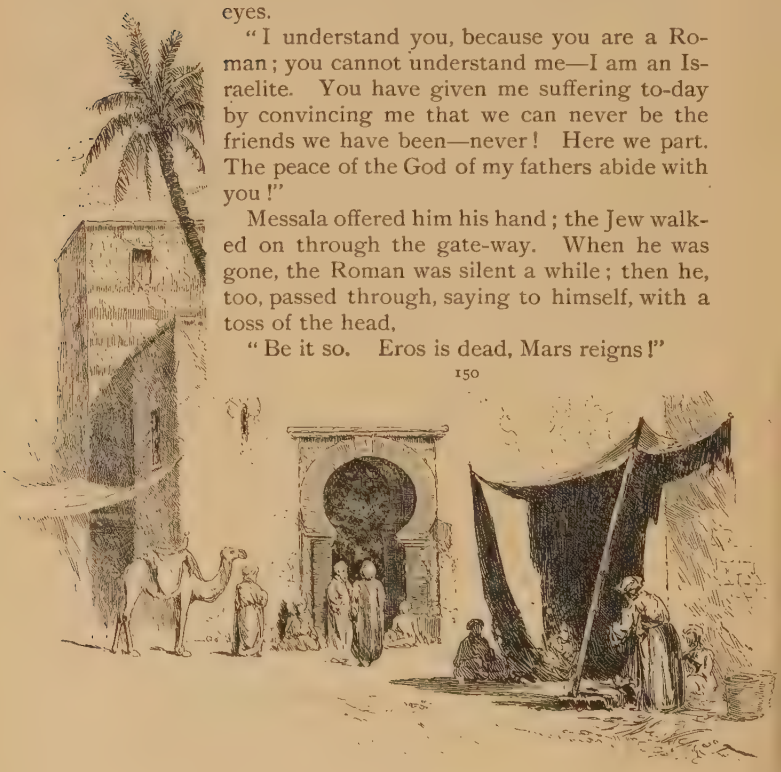
"Be wise," continued Messala. "Give up the follies of Moses and the traditions; see the situation as it is. Dare look the Parcæ in the face, and they will tell you, Rome is the world. Ask them of Judea, and they will answer, She is what Rome wills."

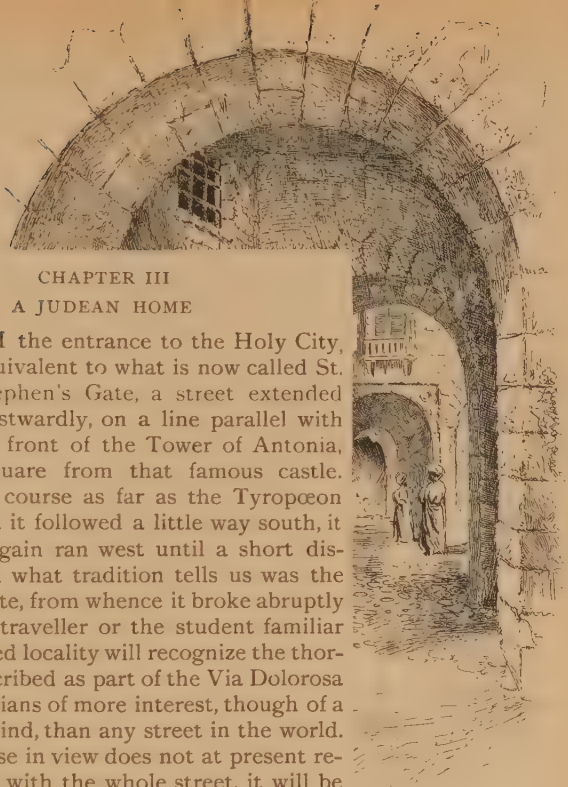
They were now at the gate. Judah stopped, and took the hand gently from his shoulder, and confronted Messala, tears trembling in his eyes.

"I understand you, because you are a Roman; you cannot understand me—I am an Israelite. You have given me suffering to-day by convincing me that we can never be the friends we have been—never! Here we part. The peace of the God of my fathers abide with you!"

Messala offered him his hand; the Jew walked on through the gate-way. When he was gone, the Roman was silent a while; then he, too, passed through, saying to himself, with a toss of the head,

"Be it so. Eros is dead, Mars reigns!"



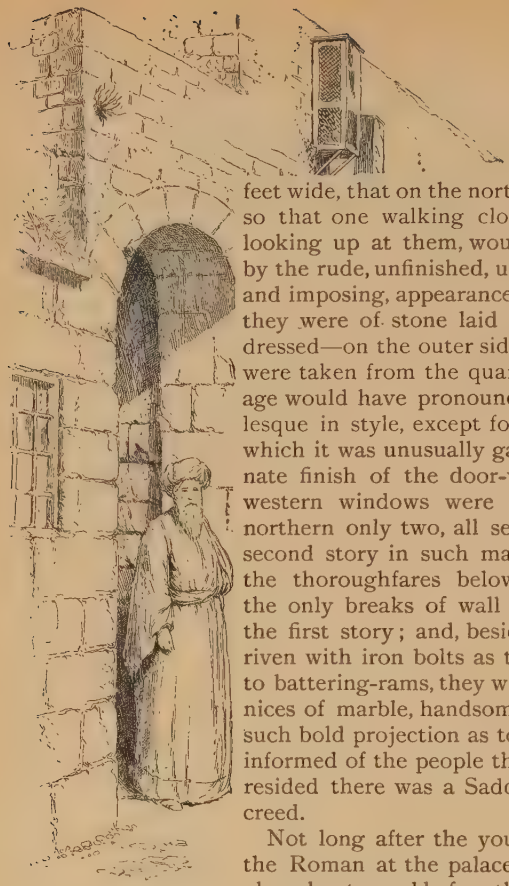


CHAPTER III

A JUDEAN HOME

FROM the entrance to the Holy City, equivalent to what is now called St. Stephen's Gate, a street extended westwardly, on a line parallel with the northern front of the Tower of Antonia, though a square from that famous castle. Keeping the course as far as the Tyropœon Valley, which it followed a little way south, it turned and again ran west until a short distance beyond what tradition tells us was the Judgment Gate, from whence it broke abruptly south. The traveller or the student familiar with the sacred locality will recognize the thoroughfare described as part of the Via Dolorosa —with Christians of more interest, though of a melancholy kind, than any street in the world. As the purpose in view does not at present require dealing with the whole street, it will be sufficient to point out a house standing in the angle last mentioned as marking the change of direction south, and which, as an important centre of interest, needs somewhat particular description.

The building fronted north and west, probably four hundred feet each way, and, like most pretentious Eastern structures, was two stories in height, and perfectly quadrangular. The street on the west side was about twelve



feet wide, that on the north not more than ten; so that one walking close to the walls, and looking up at them, would have been struck by the rude, unfinished, uninviting, but strong and imposing, appearance they presented; for they were of stone laid in large blocks, undressed—on the outer side, in fact, just as they were taken from the quarry. A critic of this age would have pronounced the house fortelesque in style, except for the windows, with which it was unusually garnished, and the ornate finish of the door-ways or gates. The western windows were four in number, the northern only two, all set on the line of the second story in such manner as to overhang the thoroughfares below. The gates were the only breaks of wall externally visible in the first story; and, besides being so thickly riven with iron bolts as to suggest resistance to battering-rams, they were protected by cornices of marble, handsomely executed, and of such bold projection as to assure visitors well informed of the people that the rich man who resided there was a Sadducee in politics and creed.

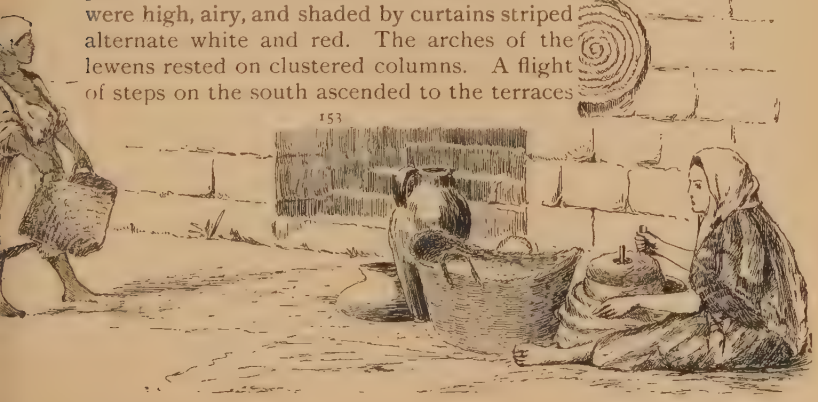
Not long after the young Jew parted from the Roman at the palace up on the Market-place, he stopped before the western gate of the house described, and knocked. The wicket (a door hung in one of the valves of the gate) was opened to admit him. He stepped in hastily, and failed to acknowledge the low salaam of the porter.

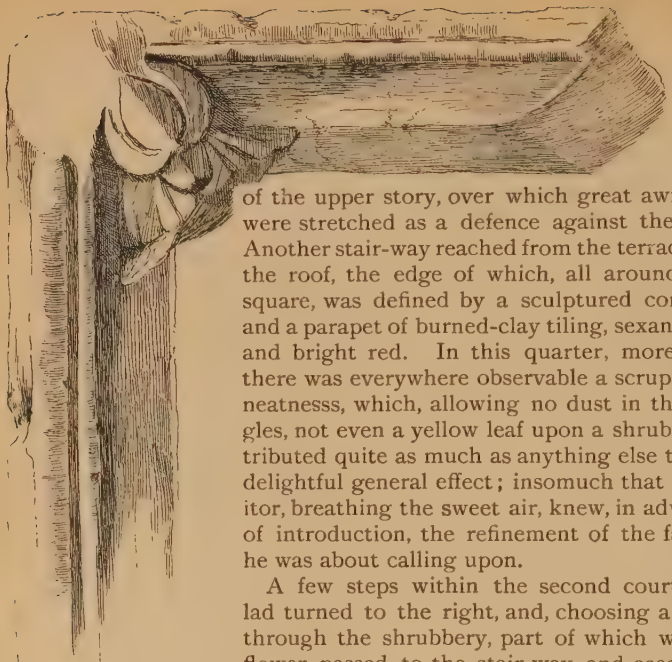
To get an idea of the interior arrangement

of the structure, as well as to see what more befell the youth, we will follow him.

The passage into which he was admitted appeared not unlike a narrow tunnel with panelled walls and pitted ceiling. There were benches of stone on both sides, stained and polished by long use. Twelve or fifteen steps carried him into a court-yard, oblong north and south, and in every quarter, except the east, bounded by what seemed the fronts of two-story houses; of which the lower floor was divided into lewens, while the upper was terraced and defended by strong balustrading. The servants coming and going along the terraces; the noise of millstones grinding; the garments fluttering from ropes stretched from point to point; the chickens and pigeons in full enjoyment of the place; the goats, cows, donkeys, and horses stabled in the lewens; a massive trough of water, apparently for the common use, declared this court appurtenant to the domestic management of the owner. Eastwardly there was a division-wall broken by another passage-way in all respects like the first one.

Clearing the second passage, the young man entered a second court, spacious, square, and set with shrubbery and vines, kept fresh and beautiful by water from a basin erected near a porch on the north side. The lewens here were high, airy, and shaded by curtains striped alternate white and red. The arches of the lewens rested on clustered columns. A flight of steps on the south ascended to the terraces





of the upper story, over which great awnings were stretched as a defence against the sun. Another stair-way reached from the terraces to the roof, the edge of which, all around the square, was defined by a sculptured cornice, and a parapet of burned-clay tiling, sexangular and bright red. In this quarter, moreover, there was everywhere observable a scrupulous neatnesss, which, allowing no dust in the angles, not even a yellow leaf upon a shrub, contributed quite as much as anything else to the delightful general effect; insomuch that a visitor, breathing the sweet air, knew, in advance of introduction, the refinement of the family he was about calling upon.

A few steps within the second court, the lad turned to the right, and, choosing a walk through the shrubbery, part of which was in flower, passed to the stair-way, and ascended to the terrace — a broad pavement of white and brown flags closely laid, and much worn. Making way under the awning to a door-way on the north side, he entered an apartment which the dropping of the screen behind him returned to darkness. Nevertheless, he proceeded, moving over a tiled floor to a divan, upon which he flung himself, face downward, and lay at rest, his forehead upon his crossed arms.

About nightfall a woman came to the door and called; he answered, and she went in.

"Supper is over, and it is night. Is not my son hungry?" she asked,

"No," he replied,

"Are you sick?"

"I am sleepy."

"Your mother has asked for you."

"Where is she?"

"In the summer-house on the roof."

He stirred himself, and sat up.

"Very well. Bring me something to eat."

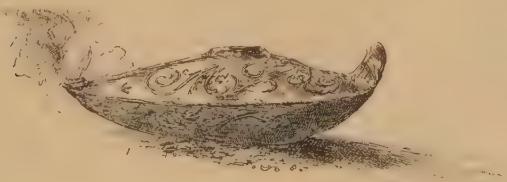
"What do you want?"

"What you please, Amrah. I am not sick, but indifferent. Life does not seem as pleasant as it did this morning. A new ailment, O my Amrah; and you who know me so well, who never failed me, may think of the things now that answer for food and medicine. Bring me what you choose."

Amrah's questions, and the voice in which she put them—low, sympathetic, and solicitous—were significant of an endeared relation between the two. She laid her hand upon his forehead; then, as satisfied, went out, saying, "I will see."

After a while she returned, bearing on a wooden platter a bowl of milk, some thin cakes of white bread broken, a delicate paste of brayed wheat, a bird broiled, and honey and salt. On one end of the platter there was a silver goblet full of wine, on the other a brazen hand-lamp lighted.

The room was then revealed: its walls smoothly plastered; the ceiling broken by great oaken rafters, brown with rain-stains and time; the floor of small diamond-shaped white and blue tiles, very firm and enduring; a few stools with legs carved in imitation of the legs of



lions; a divan raised a little above the floor, trimmed with blue cloth, and partially covered by an immense striped woollen blanket or shawl—in brief, a Hebrew bedroom.

The same light also gave the woman to view. Drawing a stool to the divan, she placed the platter upon it, then knelt close by ready to serve him. Her face was that of a woman of fifty, dark-skinned, dark-eyed, and at the moment softened by a look of tenderness almost maternal. A white turban covered her head, leaving the lobes of the ear exposed, and in them the sign that settled her condition—an orifice bored by a thick awl. She was a slave, of Egyptian origin, to whom not even the sacred fiftieth year could have brought freedom; nor would she have accepted it, for the boy she was attending was her life. She had nursed him through babyhood, tended him as a child, and could not break the service. To her love he could never be a man.

He spoke but once during the meal.

"You remember, O my Amrah," he said, "the Messala who used to visit me here days at a time."

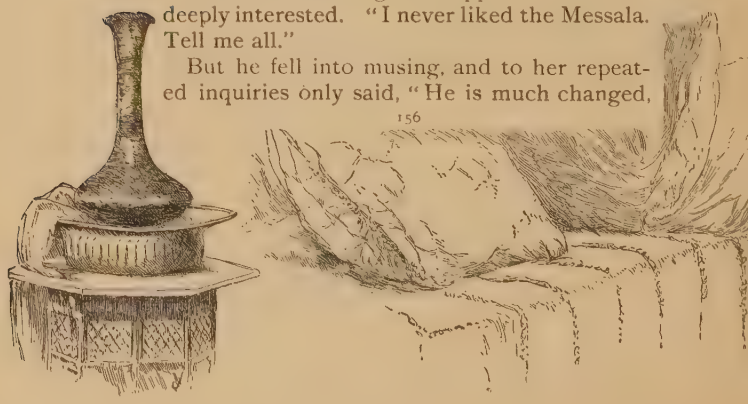
"I remember him."

"He went to Rome some years ago, and is now back. I called upon him to-day."

A shudder of disgust seized the lad.

"I knew something had happened," she said, deeply interested. "I never liked the Messala. Tell me all."

But he fell into musing, and to her repeated inquiries only said, "He is much changed,



and I shall have nothing more to do with him."

When Amrah took the platter away, he also went out, and up from the terrace to the roof.

The reader is presumed to know somewhat of the uses of the house-top in the East. In the matter of customs, climate is a lawgiver everywhere. The Syrian summer day drives the seeker of comfort into the darkened lewen; night, however, calls him forth early, and the shadows deepening over the mountain-sides seem veils dimly covering Circean singers; but they are far off, while the roof is close by, and raised above the level of the shimmering plain enough for the visitation of cool airs, and sufficiently above the trees to allure the stars down closer, down at least into brighter shining. So the roof became a resort—became play-ground, sleeping-chamber, boudoir, rendezvous for the family, place of music, dance, conversation, reverie, and prayer.

The motive that prompts the decoration, at whatever cost, of interiors in colder climes suggested to the Oriental the embellishment of his house-top. The parapet ordered by Moses became a potter's triumph; above that, later, arose towers, plain and fantastic; still later, kings and princes crowned their roofs with summer-houses of marble and gold. When the Babylonian hung gardens in the air, extravagance could push the idea no further.

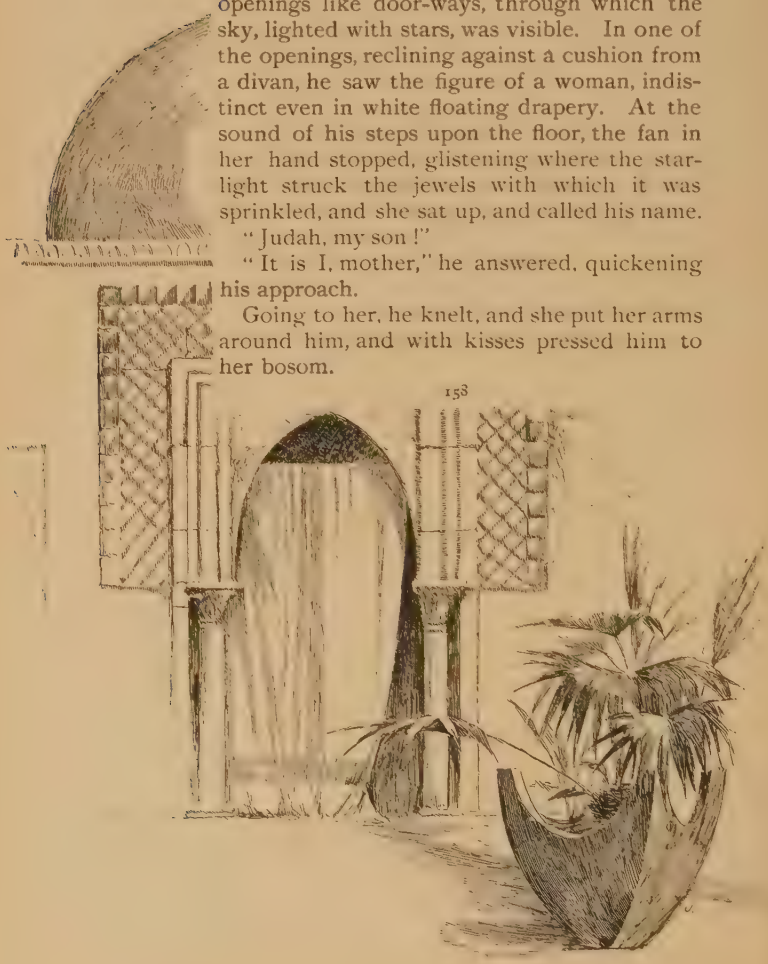
The lad whom we are following walked slowly across the house-top to a tower built

over the north-west corner of the palace. Had he been a stranger, he might have bestowed a glance upon the structure as he drew nigh it, and seen all the dimness permitted — a darkened mass, low, latticed, pillared, and domed. He entered, passing under a half-raised curtain. The interior was all darkness, except that on four sides there were arched openings like door-ways, through which the sky, lighted with stars, was visible. In one of the openings, reclining against a cushion from a divan, he saw the figure of a woman, indistinct even in white floating drapery. At the sound of his steps upon the floor, the fan in her hand stopped, glistening where the starlight struck the jewels with which it was sprinkled, and she sat up, and called his name.

"Judah, my son!"

"It is I, mother," he answered, quickening his approach.

Going to her, he knelt, and she put her arms around him, and with kisses pressed him to her bosom.



CHAPTER IV

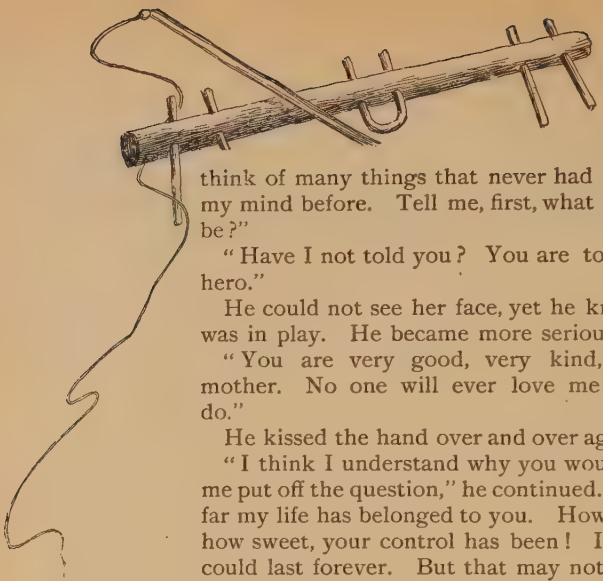
THE STRANGE THINGS BEN-HUR WANTS TO KNOW

THE mother resumed her easy position against the cushion, while the son took place on the divan, his head in her lap. Both of them, looking out of the opening, could see a stretch of lower house-tops in the vicinity, a bank of blue blackness over in the west which they knew to be mountains, and the sky, its shadowy depths brilliant with stars. The city was still. Only the winds stirred.

"Amrah tells me something has happened to you," she said, caressing his cheek. "When my Judah was a child, I allowed small things to trouble him, but he is now a man. He must not forget"—her voice became very soft—"that one day he is to be my hero."

She spoke in the language almost lost in the land, but which a few—and they were always as rich in blood as in possessions—cherished in its purity, that they might be more certainly distinguished from Gentile peoples—the language in which the loved Rebekah and Rachel sang to Benjamin.

The words appeared to set him thinking anew; after a while, however, he caught the hand with which she fanned him, and said, "To-day, O my mother, I have been made to



think of many things that never had place in my mind before. Tell me, first, what am I to be?"

"Have I not told you? You are to be my hero."

He could not see her face, yet he knew she was in play. He became more serious.

"You are very good, very kind, O my mother. No one will ever love me as you do."

He kissed the hand over and over again.

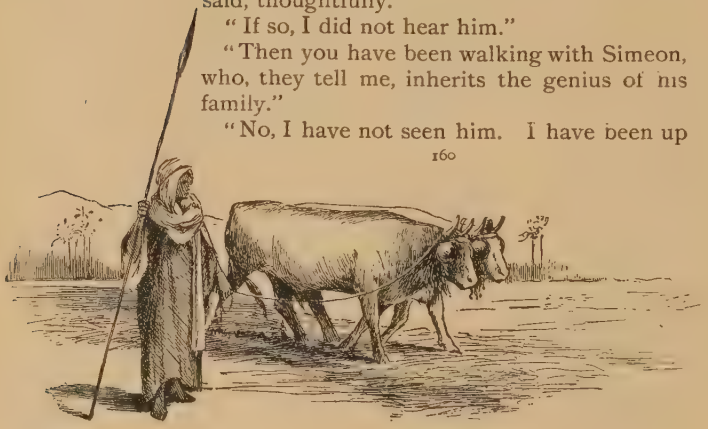
"I think I understand why you would have me put off the question," he continued. "Thus far my life has belonged to you. How gentle, how sweet, your control has been! I wish it could last forever. But that may not be. It is the Lord's will that I shall one day become owner of myself—a day of separation, and therefore a dreadful day to you. Let us be brave and serious. I will be your hero, but you must put me in the way. You know the law—every son of Israel must have some occupation. I am not exempt, and ask now, shall I tend the herds? or till the soil? or drive the saw? or be a clerk or a lawyer? What shall I be? Dear, good mother, help me to an answer."

"Gamaliel has been lecturing to-day," she said, thoughtfully.

"If so, I did not hear him."

"Then you have been walking with Simeon, who, they tell me, inherits the genius of his family."

"No, I have not seen him. I have been up



on the Market-place, not to the Temple. I visited the young Messala."

A certain change in his voice attracted the mother's attention. A presentiment quickened the beating of her heart; the fan became motionless again.

"The Messala!" she said. "What could he say to so trouble you?"

"He is very much changed."

"You mean he has come back a Roman."

"Yes."

"Roman!" she continued, half to herself. "To all the world the word means master. How long has he been away?"

"Five years."

She raised her head, and looked off into the night.

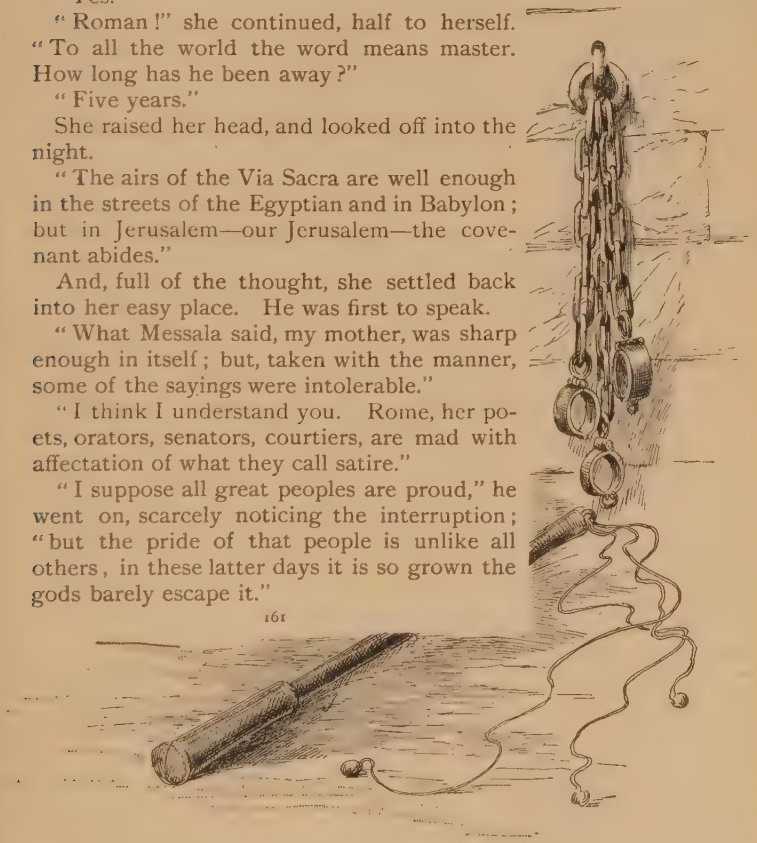
"The airs of the Via Sacra are well enough in the streets of the Egyptian and in Babylon; but in Jerusalem—our Jerusalem—the covenant abides."

And, full of the thought, she settled back into her easy place. He was first to speak.

"What Messala said, my mother, was sharp enough in itself; but, taken with the manner, some of the sayings were intolerable."

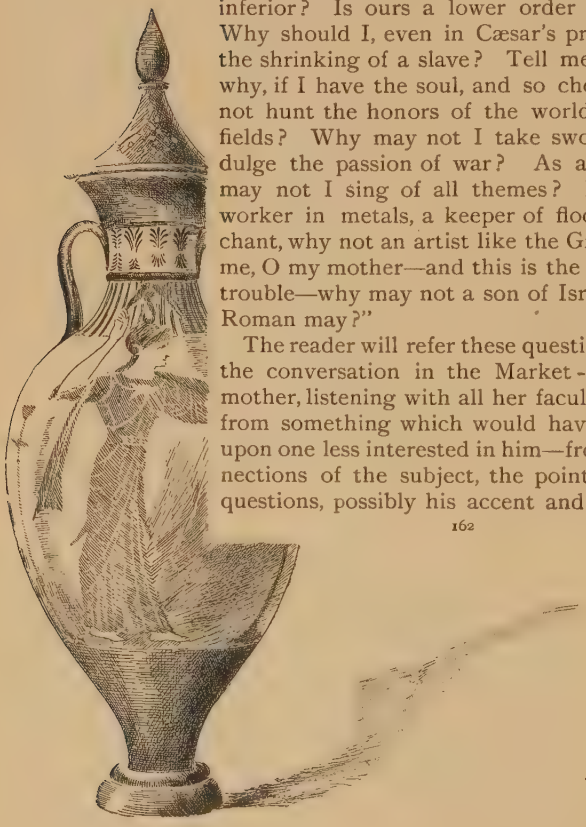
"I think I understand you. Rome, her poets, orators, senators, courtiers, are mad with affectation of what they call satire."

"I suppose all great peoples are proud," he went on, scarcely noticing the interruption; "but the pride of that people is unlike all others, in these latter days it is so grown the gods barely escape it."



"The gods escape!" said the mother, quickly. "More than one Roman has accepted worship as his divine right."

"Well, Messala always had his share of the disagreeable quality. When he was a child, I have seen him mock strangers whom even Herod condescended to receive with honors; yet he always spared Judea. For the first time, in conversation with me to-day, he trifled with our customs and God. As you would have had me do, I parted with him finally. And now, O my dear mother, I would know with more certainty if there be just ground for the Roman's contempt. In what am I his inferior? Is ours a lower order of people? Why should I, even in Cæsar's presence, feel the shrinking of a slave? Tell me especially why, if I have the soul, and so choose, I may not hunt the honors of the world in all its fields? Why may not I take sword and indulge the passion of war? As a poet, why may not I sing of all themes? I can be a worker in metals, a keeper of flocks, a merchant, why not an artist like the Greek? Tell me, O my mother—and this is the sum of my trouble—why may not a son of Israel do all a Roman may?"



The reader will refer these questions back to the conversation in the Market-place; the mother, listening with all her faculties awake, from something which would have been lost upon one less interested in him—from the connections of the subject, the pointing of the questions, possibly his accent and tone—was

not less swift in making the same reference. She sat up, and in a voice quick and sharp as his own, replied, "I see, I see! From association Messala, in boyhood, was almost a Jew; had he remained here, he might have become a proselyte, so much do we all borrow from the influences that ripen our lives; but the years in Rome have been too much for him. I do not wonder at the change; yet"—her voice fell—"he might have dealt tenderly at least with you. It is a hard, cruel nature which in youth can forget its first loves."

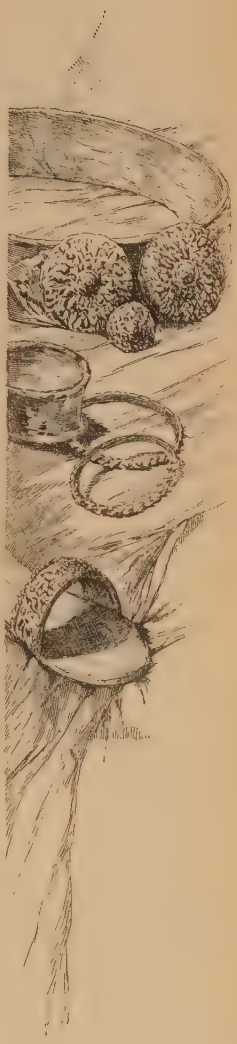
Her hand dropped lightly upon his forehead, and the fingers caught in his hair and lingered there lovingly, while her eyes sought the highest stars in view. Her pride responded to his, not merely in echo, but in the unison of perfect sympathy. She would answer him; at the same time, not for the world would she have had the answer unsatisfactory: an admission of inferiority might weaken his spirit for life. She faltered with misgivings of her own powers.

"What you propose, O my Judah, is not a subject for treatment by a woman. Let me put its consideration off till to-morrow, and I will have the wise Simeon—"

"Do not send me to the Rector," he said, abruptly.

"I will have him come to us."

"No, I seek more than information; while he might give me that better than you, O my mother, you can do better by giving me what he cannot—the resolution which is the soul of a man's soul."



She swept the heavens with a rapid glance, trying to compass all the meaning of his questions.

"While craving justice for ourselves, it is never wise to be unjust to others. To deny valor in the enemy we have conquered is to underrate our victory; and if the enemy be strong enough to hold us at bay, much more to conquer us"—she hesitated—"self-respect bids us seek some other explanation of our misfortunes than accusing him of qualities inferior to our own."

Thus, speaking to herself rather than to him, she began:

"Take heart, O my son. The Messala is nobly descended; his family has been illustrious through many generations. In the days of Republican Rome—how far back I cannot tell—they were famous, some as soldiers, some as civilians. I can recall but one consul of the name; their rank was senatorial, and their patronage always sought because they were always rich. Yet if to-day your friend boasted of his ancestry, you might have shamed him by recounting yours. If he referred to the ages through which the line is traceable, or to deeds, rank, or wealth—such allusions, except when great occasion demands them, are tokens of small minds—if he mentioned them in proof of his superiority, then without dread, and standing on each particular, you might have challenged him to a comparison of records."

Taking a moment's thought, the mother proceeded:

"One of the ideas of fast hold now is that time has much to do with the nobility of races and families. A Roman boasting his superiority on that account over a son of Israel will always fail when put to the proof. The founding of Rome was his beginning; the very best of them cannot trace their descent beyond that period; few of them pretend to do so; and of such as do, I say not one could make good his claim except by resort to tradition. Messala certainly could not. Let us look now to ourselves. Could we better?"

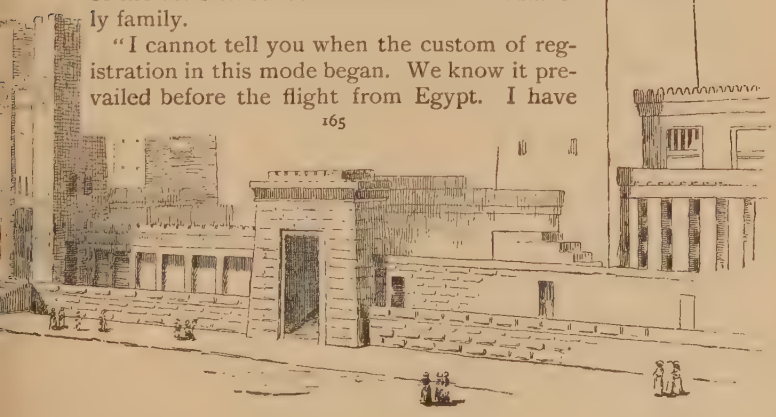
A little more light would have enabled him to see the pride that diffused itself over her face.

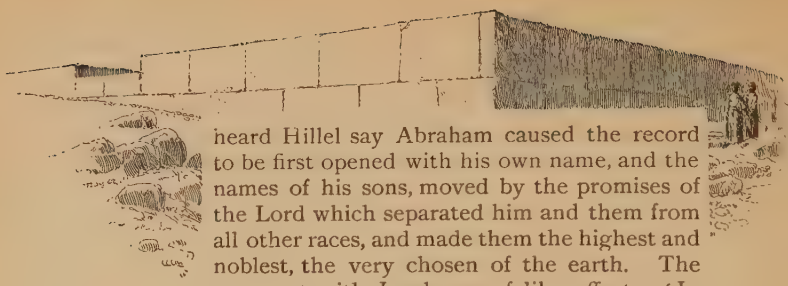
"Let us imagine the Roman putting us to the challenge. I would answer him, neither doubting nor boastful."

Her voice faltered; a tender thought changed the form of the argument.

"Your father, O my Judah, is at rest with his fathers; yet I remember, as though it were this evening, the day he and I, with many rejoicing friends, went up into the Temple to present you to the Lord. We sacrificed the doves, and to the priest I gave your name, which he wrote in my presence—'Judah, son of Ithamar, of the House of Hur.' The name was then carried away, and written in a book of the division of records devoted to the saintly family.

"I cannot tell you when the custom of registration in this mode began. We know it prevailed before the flight from Egypt. I have





heard Hillel say Abraham caused the record to be first opened with his own name, and the names of his sons, moved by the promises of the Lord which separated him and them from all other races, and made them the highest and noblest, the very chosen of the earth. The covenant with Jacob was of like effect. 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'—so said the angel to Abraham in the place Jehovah-jireh. 'And the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed'—so the Lord himself said to Jacob asleep at Bethel on the way to Haran. Afterwards the wise men looked forward to a just division of the land of promise; and, that it might be known in the day of partition who were entitled to portions, the Book of Generations was begun. But not for that alone. The promise of a blessing to all the earth through the patriarch reached far into the future. One name was mentioned in connection with the blessing—the benefactor might be the humblest of the chosen family, for the Lord our God knows no distinctions of rank or riches. So, to make the performance clear to men of the generation who were to witness it, and that they might give the glory to whom it belonged, the record was required to be kept with absolute certainty. Has it been so kept?"

The fan played to and fro, until, becoming impatient, he repeated the question, "Is the record absolutely true?"

"Hillel said it was, and of all who have lived no one was so well-informed upon the subject.

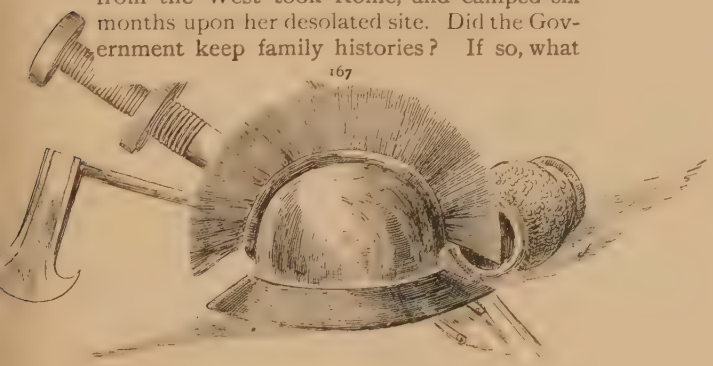
Our people have at times been heedless of some parts of the law, but never of this part. The good rector himself has followed the Books of Generations through three periods—from the promises to the opening of the Temple; thence to the Captivity; thence, again, to the present. Once only were the records disturbed, and that was at the end of the second period; but when the nation returned from the long exile, as a first duty to God, Zerubbabel restored the Books, enabling us once more to carry the lines of Jewish descent back unbroken fully two thousand years. And now—"

She paused as if to allow the hearer to measure the time comprehended in the statement.

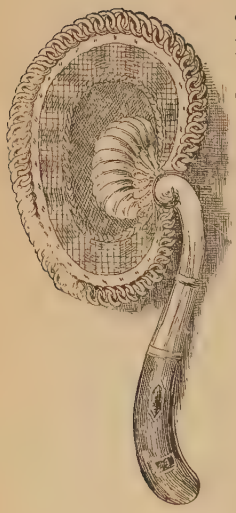
"And now," she continued, "what becomes of the Roman boast of blood enriched by ages? By that test, the sons of Israel watching the herds on old Rephaim yonder are nobler than the noblest of the Marcii."

"And I, mother—by the Books, who am I?"

"What I have said thus far, my son, had reference to your question. I will answer you. If Messala were here, he might say, as others have said, that the exact trace of your lineage stopped when the Assyrian took Jerusalem, and razed the Temple, with all its precious stores; but you might plead the pious action of Zerubbabel, and retort that all verity in Roman genealogy ended when the barbarians from the West took Rome, and camped six months upon her desolated site. Did the Government keep family histories? If so, what



became of them in those dreadful days? No, no; there is verity in our Books of Generations; and, following them back to the Captivity, back to the foundation of the first Temple, back to the march from Egypt, we have absolute assurance that you are lineally sprung from Hur, the associate of Joshua. In the matter of descent sanctified by time, is not the honor perfect? Do you care to pursue further? If so, take the Torah, and search the Book of Numbers, and of the seventy-two generations after Adam you can find the very progenitor of your house."



There was silence for a time in the chamber on the roof.

"I thank you, O my mother," Judah next said, clasping both her hands in his; "I thank you with all my heart. I was right in not having the good rector called in; he could not have satisfied me more than you have. Yet to make a family truly noble, is time alone sufficient?"

"Ah, you forget, you forget; our claim rests not merely upon time; the Lord's preference is our especial glory."

"You are speaking of the race, and I, mother, of the family—our family. In the years since Father Abraham, what have they achieved? What have they done? What great things to lift them above the level of their fellows?"

She hesitated, thinking she might all this time have mistaken his object. The information he sought might have been for more than

satisfaction of wounded vanity. Youth is but the painted shell within which, continually growing, lives that wondrous thing the spirit of a man, biding its moment of apparition, earlier in some than in others. She trembled under a perception that this might be the supreme moment come to him; that as children at birth reach out their untried hands grasping for shadows, and crying the while, so his spirit might, in temporary blindness, be struggling to take hold of its impalpable future. They to whom a boy comes asking, Who am I, and what am I to be? have need of ever so much care. Each word in answer may prove to the after-life what each finger-touch of the artist is to the clay he is modelling.

"I have a feeling, O my Judah," she said, patting his cheek with the hand he had been caressing—"I have the feeling that all I have said has been in strife with an antagonist more real than imaginary. If Messala is the enemy, do not leave me to fight him in the dark. Tell me all he said."

CHAPTER V

ROME AND ISRAEL—A COMPARISON

THE young Israelite proceeded then, and rehearsed his conversation with Messala, dwelling with particularity upon the latter's speeches in contempt of the Jews, their customs, and much-pent round of life.

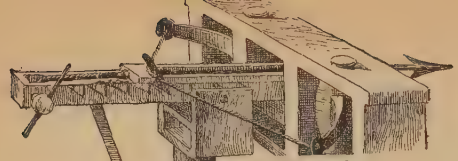
Afraid to speak the while, the mother listened, discerning the matter plainly. Judah had gone to the palace on the Market-place, allured by love of a playmate whom he thought to find exactly as he had been at the parting years before; a man met him, and, in place of laughter and references to the sports of the past, the man had been full of the future, and talked of glory to be won, and of riches and power. Unconscious of the effect, the visitor had come away hurt in pride, yet touched with a natural ambition; but she, the jealous mother, saw it, and, not knowing the turn the aspiration might take, became at once Jewish in her fear. What if it lured him away from the patriarchal faith? In her view, that consequence was more dreadful than any or all others. She could discover but one way to avert it, and she set about the task, her native power reinforced by love to such degree that her speech took a masculine strength and at times a poet's fervor.

"There never has been a people," she began, "who did not think themselves at least equal to any other; never a great nation, my son, that did not believe itself the very superior. When the Roman looks down upon Israel and laughs, he merely repeats the folly of the Egyptian, the Assyrian, and the Macedonian; and as the laugh is against God, the result will be the same."

Her voice became firmer.

"There is no law by which to determine the superiority of nations; hence the vanity of the claim, and the idleness of disputes about it. A people risen, run their race, and die either of themselves or at the hands of another, who, succeeding to their power, take possession of their place, and upon their monuments write new names; such is history. If I were called upon to symbolize God and man in the simplest form, I would draw a straight line and a circle; and of the line I would say, 'This is God, for he alone moves forever straightforward;' and of the circle, 'This is man—such is his progress.' I do not mean that there is no difference between the careers of nations; no two are alike. The difference, however, is not, as some say, in the extent of the circle they describe or the space of earth they cover, but in the sphere of their movement, the highest being nearest God.

"To stop here, my son, would be to leave the subject where we began. Let us go on. There are signs by which to measure the height of the circle each nation runs while in its course.

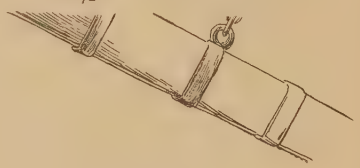


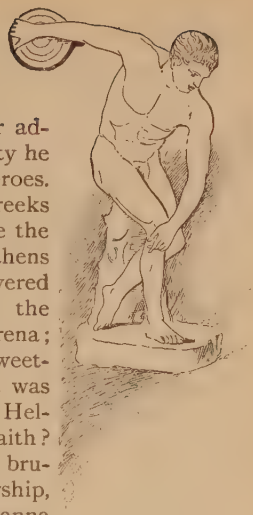
By them let us compare the Hebrew and the Roman.

"The simplest of all the signs is the daily life of the people. Of this I will only say, Israel has at times forgotten God, while the Roman never knew him; consequently comparison is not possible.

"Your friend, or your former friend, charged, if I understood you rightly, that we have had no poets, artists, or warriors; by which he meant, I suppose, to deny that we have had great men, the next most certain of the signs. A just consideration of this charge requires a definition at the commencement. A great man, O my boy, is one whose life proves him to have been recognized, if not called, by God. A Persian was used to punish our recreant fathers, and he carried them into captivity; another Persian was selected to restore their children to the Holy Land; greater than either of them, however, was the Macedonian through whom the desolation of Judea and the Temple was avenged. The special distinction of the men was that they were chosen by the Lord, each for a divine purpose; and that they were Gentiles does not lessen their glory. Do not lose sight of this definition while I proceed.

"There is an idea that war is the most noble occupation of men, and that the most exalted greatness is the growth of battle-fields. Because the world has adopted the idea, be not you deceived. That we must worship something is a law which will continue as long as there is anything we cannot understand. The





prayer of the barbarian is a wail of fear addressed to Strength, the only divine quality he can clearly conceive; hence his faith in heroes. What is Jove but a Roman hero? The Greeks have their great glory because they were the first to set Mind above Strength. In Athens the orator and philosopher were more revered than the warrior. The charioteer and the swiftest runner are still idols of the arena; yet the immortelles are reserved for the sweetest singer. The birthplace of one poet was contested by seven cities. But was the Hellene the first to deny the old barbaric faith? No. My son, that glory is ours; against brutalism our fathers erected God; in our worship, the wail of fear gave place to the Hosanna and the Psalm. So the Hebrew and the Greek would have carried all humanity forward and upward. But, alas! the government of the world presumes war as an eternal condition; wherefore, over Mind and above God, the Roman has enthroned his Cæsar, the absorbent of all attainable power, the prohibition of any other greatness.

"The sway of the Greek was a flowering time for genius. In return for the liberty it then enjoyed, what a company of thinkers the Mind led forth? There was a glory for every excellence, and a perfection so absolute that in everything but war even the Roman has stooped to imitation. A Greek is now the model of the orators in the Forum; listen, and in every Roman song you will hear the rhythm of the Greek; if a Roman opens his mouth

speaking wisely of moralities, or abstractions, or of the mysteries of nature, he is either a plagiarist or the disciple of some school which had a Greek for its founder. In nothing but war, I say again, has Rome a claim to originality. Her games and spectacles are Greek inventions, dashed with blood to gratify the ferocity of her rabble; her religion, if such it may be called, is made up of contributions from the faiths of all other peoples; her most venerated gods are from Olympus—even her Mars, and, for that matter, the Jove she much magnifies. So it happens, O my son, that of the whole world our Israel alone can dispute the superiority of the Greek, and with him contest the palm of original genius.

"To the excellences of other peoples the egotism of a Roman is a blindfold, impenetrable as his breastplate. Oh, the ruthless robbers! Under their trampling the earth trembles like a floor beaten with flails. Along with the rest we are fallen—alas that I should say it to you, my son! They have our highest places, and the holiest, and the end no man can tell; but this I know—they may reduce Judea as an almond broken with hammers, and devour Jerusalem, which is the oil and sweetness thereof; yet the glory of the men of Israel will remain a light in the heavens overhead out of reach; for their history is the history of God, who wrote with their hands, spake with their tongues, and was himself in all the good they did, even the least; who dwelt with them, a Lawgiver on Sinai, a Guide in the

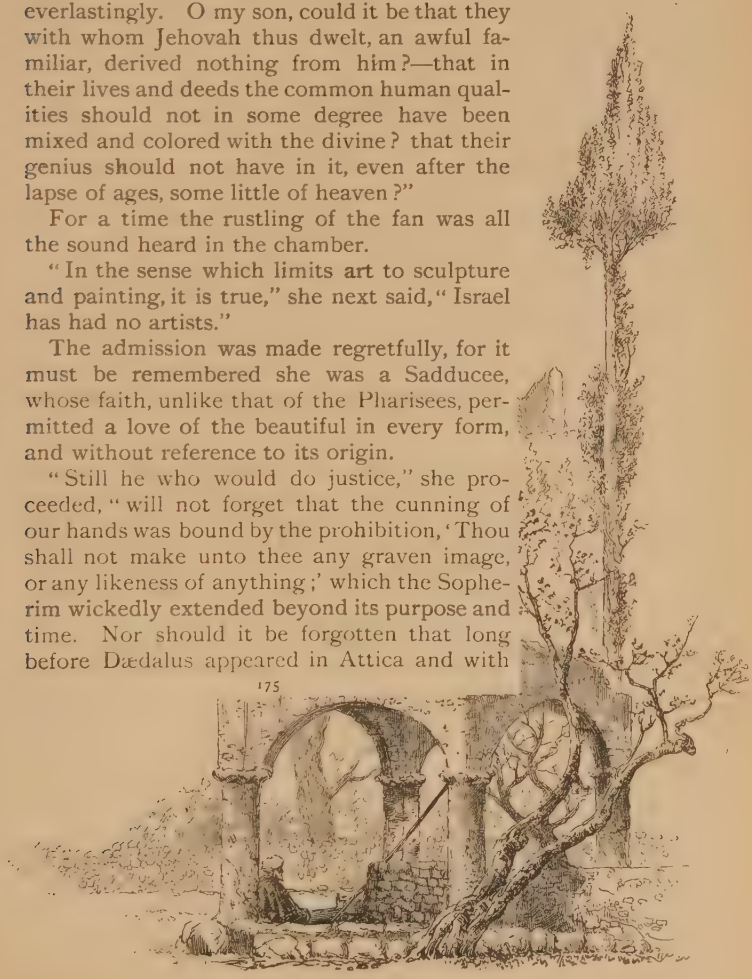
wilderness, in war a Captain, in government a King; who once and again pushed back the curtains of the pavilion which is his resting-place, intolerably bright, and, as a man speaking to men, showed them the right, and the way to happiness, and how they should live, and made them promises binding the strength of his Almightiness with covenants sworn to everlastingly. O my son, could it be that they with whom Jehovah thus dwelt, an awful familiar, derived nothing from him?—that in their lives and deeds the common human qualities should not in some degree have been mixed and colored with the divine? that their genius should not have in it, even after the lapse of ages, some little of heaven?"

For a time the rustling of the fan was all the sound heard in the chamber.

"In the sense which limits art to sculpture and painting, it is true," she next said, "Israel has had no artists."

The admission was made regretfully, for it must be remembered she was a Sadducee, whose faith, unlike that of the Pharisees, permitted a love of the beautiful in every form, and without reference to its origin.

"Still he who would do justice," she proceeded, "will not forget that the cunning of our hands was bound by the prohibition, 'Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything;' which the Sopherim wickedly extended beyond its purpose and time. Nor should it be forgotten that long before Dædalus appeared in Attica and with

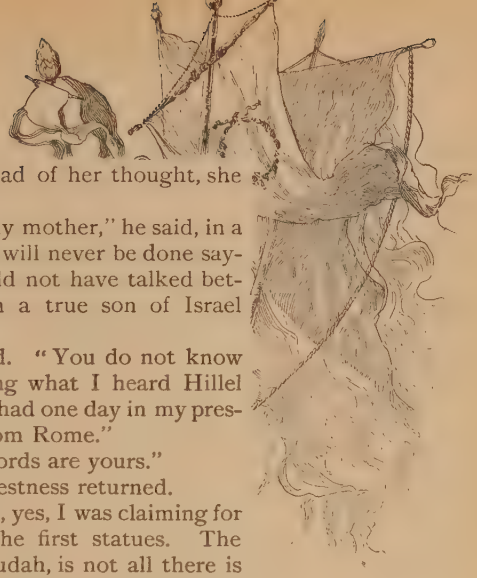


his wooden statues so transformed sculpture as to make possible the schools of Corinth and Ægina, and their ultimate triumphs the Pœcile and Capitolium—long before the age of Dædalus, I say, two Israelites, Bezaleel and Aholiab, the master-builders of the first tabernacle, said to have been skilled 'in all manner of workmanship,' wrought the cherubim of the mercy-seat above the ark. Of gold beaten, not chiselled, were they; and they were statues in form both human and divine. 'And they shall stretch forth their wings on high, . . . and their faces shall look one to another.' Who will say they were not beautiful? or that they were not the first statues?"

"Oh, I see now why the Greek outstripped us," said Judah, intensely interested. "And the ark; accursed be the Babylonians who destroyed it!"

"Nay, Judah, be of faith. It was not destroyed, only lost, hidden away too safely in some cavern of the mountains. One day—Hillel and Shammai both say so—one day, in the Lord's good time, it will be found and brought forth, and Israel dance before it, singing as of old. And they who look upon the faces of the cherubim then, though they have seen the face of the ivory Minerva, will be ready to kiss the hand of the Jew from love of his genius, asleep through all the thousands of years."

The mother, in her eagerness, had risen into something like the rapidity and vehemence of a speech-maker; but now, to recover herself,



or to pick up the thread of her thought, she rested a while.

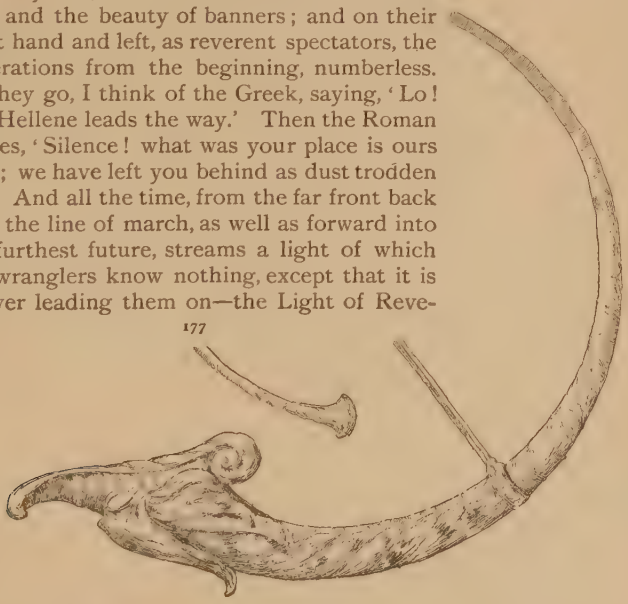
"You are so good, my mother," he said, in a grateful way. "And I will never be done saying so. Shammai could not have talked better, nor Hillel. I am a true son of Israel again."

"Flatterer!" she said. "You do not know that I am but repeating what I heard Hillel say in an argument he had one day in my presence with a sophist from Rome."

"Well, the hearty words are yours."

Directly all her earnestness returned.

"Where was I? Oh, yes, I was claiming for our Hebrew fathers the first statues. The trick of the sculptor, Judah, is not all there is of art, any more than art is all there is of greatness. I always think of great men marching down the centuries in groups and goodly companies, separable according to nationalities; here the Indian, there the Egyptian, yonder the Assyrian; above them the music of trumpets and the beauty of banners; and on their right hand and left, as reverent spectators, the generations from the beginning, numberless. As they go, I think of the Greek, saying, 'Lo! the Hellene leads the way.' Then the Roman replies, 'Silence! what was your place is ours now; we have left you behind as dust trodden on.' And all the time, from the far front back over the line of march, as well as forward into the furthest future, streams a light of which the wranglers know nothing, except that it is forever leading them on—the Light of Reve-



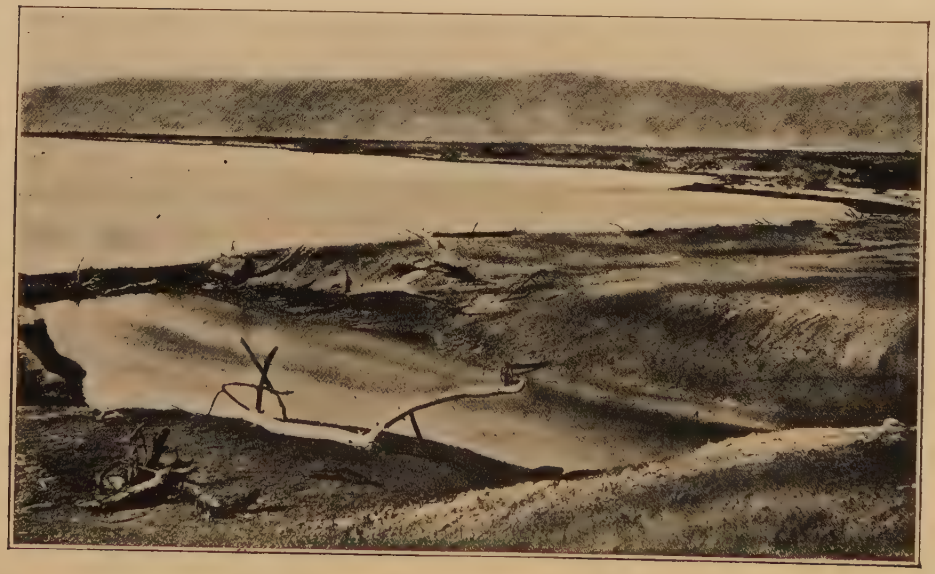
lation! Who are they that carry it? Ah, the old Judean blood! How it leaps at the thought! By the light we know them. Thrice blessed, O our fathers, servants of God, keepers of the covenants! Ye are the leaders of men, the living and the dead. The front is thine; and though every Roman were a Cæsar, ye shall not lose it!"

Judah was deeply stirred.

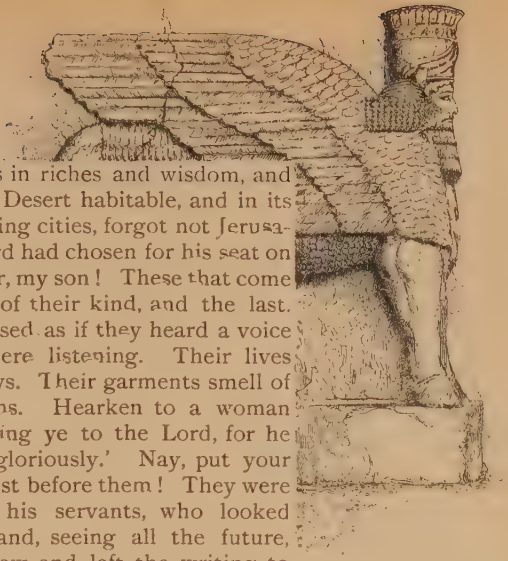
"Do not stop, I pray you," he cried. "You give me to hear the sound of timbrels. I wait for Miriam and the women who went after her dancing and singing."

She caught his feeling, and, with ready wit, wove it into her speech.

"Very well, my son. If you can hear the timbrel of the prophetess, you can do what I was about to ask; you can use your fancy, and stand with me, as if by the way-side, while the chosen of Israel pass us at the head of the procession. Now they come—the patriarchs first; next the fathers of the tribes. I almost hear the bells of their camels and the lowing of their herds. Who is he that walks alone between the companies? An old man, yet his eye is not dim, nor his natural force abated. He knew the Lord, face to face! Warrior, poet, orator, law-giver, prophet, his greatness is as the sun at morning, its flood of splendor quenching all other lights, even that of the first and noblest of the Cæsars. After him the judges. And then the kings—the son of Jesse, a hero in war, and a singer of songs eternal as that of the sea; and his son, who, pass-



THE DEAD SEA



ing all other kings in riches and wisdom, and while making the Desert habitable, and in its waste places planting cities, forgot not Jerusalem which the Lord had chosen for his seat on earth. Bend lower, my son! These that come next are the first of their kind, and the last. Their faces are raised as if they heard a voice in the sky and were listening. Their lives were full of sorrows. Their garments smell of tombs and caverns. Hearken to a woman among them — 'Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.' Nay, put your forehead in the dust before them! They were tongues of God, his servants, who looked through heaven, and, seeing all the future, wrote what they saw, and left the writing to be proven by time. Kings turned pale as they approached them, and nations trembled at the sound of their voices. The elements waited upon them. In their hands they carried every bounty and every plague. See the Tishbite and his servant Elisha! See the sad son of Hilkiah, and him, the seer of visions, by the river of Chebar! And of the three children of Judah who refused the image of the Babylonian, lo! that one who, in the feast to the thousand lords, so confounded the astrologers. And yonder—O my son, kiss the dust again!—yonder the gentle son of Amoz, from whom the world has its promise of the Messiah to come!"

In this passage the fan had been kept in rapid play; it stopped now, and her voice sank low.

"You are tired," she said.

"No," he replied, "I was listening to a new song of Israel."

The mother was still intent upon her purpose, and passed the pleasant speech.

"In such light as I could, my Judah, I have set our great men before you—patriarchs, legislators, warriors, singers, prophets. Turn we to the best of Rome. Against Moses place Cæsar, and Tarquin against David; Sylla against either of the Maccabees; the best of the consuls against the judges; Augustus against Solomon, and you are done: comparison ends there. But think then of the prophets—greatest of the great."

She laughed scornfully.

"Pardon me. I was thinking of the soothsayer who warned Caius Julius against the ides of March, and fancied him looking for the omens of evil which his master despised in the entrails of a chicken. From that picture turn to Elijah sitting on the hill-top on the way to Samaria, amid the smoking bodies of the captains and their fifties, warning the son of Ahab of the wrath of our God. Finally, O my Judah — if such speech be reverent— how shall we judge Jehovah and Jupiter unless it be by what their servants have done in their names? And as for what you shall do—"

She spoke the latter words slowly, and with a tremulous utterance.

"As for what you shall do, my boy—serve the Lord, the Lord God of Israel, not Rome. For a child of Abraham there is no glory ex-

cept in the Lord's ways, and in them there is much glory."

"I may be a soldier then?" Judah asked.

"Why not? Did not Moses call God a man of war?"

There was then a long silence in the summer chamber.

"You have my permission," she said, finally; "if only you serve the Lord instead of Cæsar."

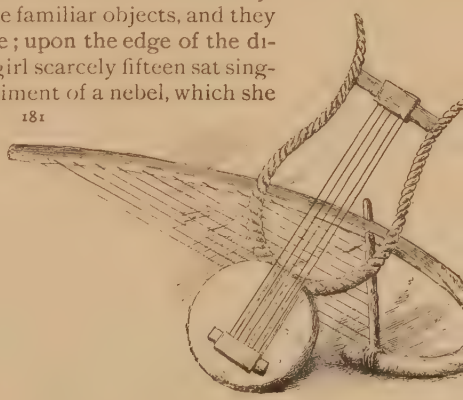
He was content with the condition, and by-and-by fell asleep. She arose then, and put the cushion under his head, and, throwing a shawl over him and kissing him tenderly, went away.

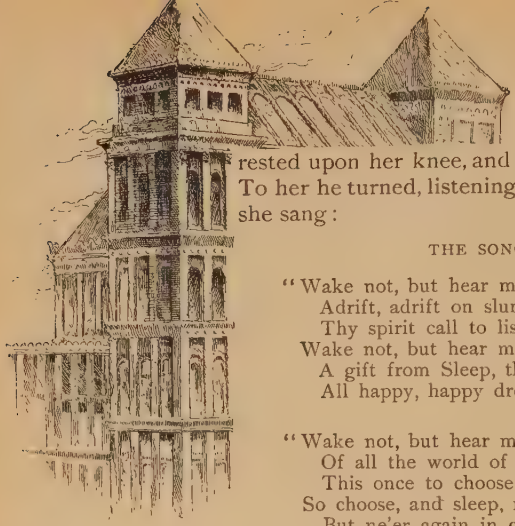
CHAPTER VI

THE ACCIDENT TO GRATUS

THE good man, like the bad, must die; but, remembering the lesson of our faith, we say of him and the event, "No matter, he will open his eyes in heaven." Nearest this in life is the waking from healthful sleep to a quick consciousness of happy sights and sounds.

When Judah awoke, the sun was up over the mountains; the pigeons were abroad in flocks, filling the air with the gleams of their white wings; and off south-east he beheld the Temple, an apparition of gold in the blue of the sky. These, however, were familiar objects, and they received but a glance; upon the edge of the divan, close by him, a girl scarcely fifteen sat singing to the accompaniment of a nebel, which she





rested upon her knee, and touched gracefully. To her he turned, listening; and this was what she sang:

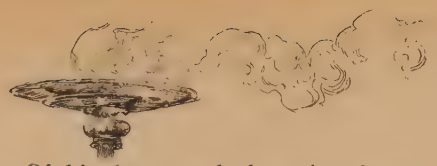
THE SONG.

"Wake not, but hear me, love!
Adrift, adrift on slumber's sea,
Thy spirit call to list to me.
Wake not, but hear me, love!
A gift from Sleep, the restful king,
All happy, happy dreams I bring.

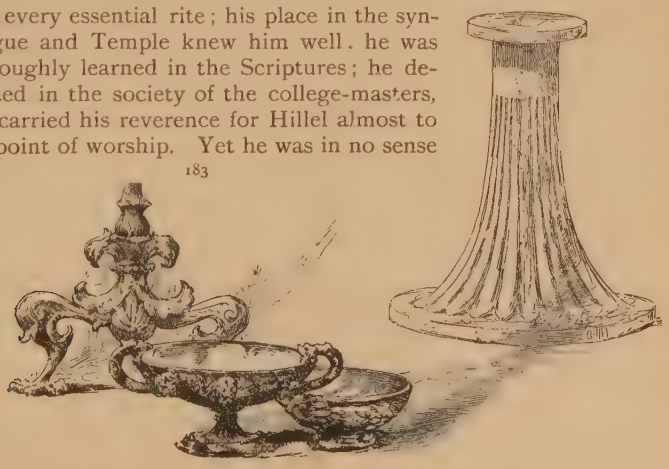
"Wake not, but hear me, love!
Of all the world of dreams 'tis thine
This once to choose the most divine.
So choose, and sleep, my love!
But ne'er again in choice be free,
Unless, unless—thou dream'st of me."

She put the instrument down, and, resting her hands in her lap, waited for him to speak. And as it has become necessary to tell somewhat of her, we will avail ourselves of the chance, and add such particulars of the family into whose privacy we are brought as the reader may wish to know.

The favors of Herod had left surviving him many persons of vast estate. Where this fortune was joined to undoubted lineal descent from some famous son of one of the tribes, especially Judah, the happy individual was accounted a Prince of Jerusalem—a distinction which sufficed to bring him the homage of his less-favored countrymen, and the respect, if nothing more, of the Gentiles with whom business and social circumstance brought him into



dealing. Of this class none had won in private or public life a higher regard than the father of the lad whom we have been following. With a remembrance of his nationality which never failed him, he had yet been true to the king, and served him faithfully at home and abroad. Some offices had taken him to Rome, where his conduct attracted the notice of Augustus, who strove without reserve to engage his friendship. In his house, accordingly, were many presents, such as had gratified the vanity of kings—purple togas, ivory chairs, golden pateræ—chiefly valuable on account of the imperial hand which had honorably conferred them. Such a man could not fail to be rich; yet his wealth was not altogether the largess of royal patrons. He had welcomed the law that bound him to some pursuit; and, instead of one, he entered into many. Of the herdsmen watching flocks on the plains and hillsides, far as old Lebanon, numbers reported to him as their employer; in the cities by the sea, and in those inland, he founded houses of traffic; his ships brought him silver from Spain, whose mines were then the richest known; while his caravans came twice a year from the East, laden with silks and spices. In faith he was a Hebrew, observant of the law and every essential rite; his place in the synagogue and Temple knew him well. he was thoroughly learned in the Scriptures; he delighted in the society of the college-masters, and carried his reverence for Hillel almost to the point of worship. Yet he was in no sense



a Separatist; his hospitality took in strangers from every land; the carping Pharisees even accused him of having more than once entertained Samaritans at his table. Had he been a Gentile, and lived, the world might have heard of him as the rival of Herodes Atticus: as it was, he perished at sea some ten years before this second period of our story, in the prime of life, and lamented everywhere in Judea. We are already acquainted with two members of his family—his widow and son; the only other was a daughter—she whom we have seen singing to her brother.

Tirzah was her name, and as the two looked at each other, their resemblance was plain. Her features had the regularity of his, and were of the same Jewish type; they had also the charm of childish innocency of expression. Home-life and its trustful love permitted the negligent attire in which she appeared. A chemise buttoned upon the right shoulder, and passing loosely over the breast and back and under the left arm, but half concealed her person above the waist, while it left the arms entirely nude. A girdle caught the folds of the garment, marking the commencement of the skirt. The coiffure was very simple and becoming—a silken cap, Tyrian-dyed; and over that a striped scarf of the same material, beautifully embroidered, and wound about in thin folds so as to show the shape of the head without enlarging it; the whole finished by a tassel dropping from the crown point of the cap. She had rings, ear and finger; anklets

and bracelets, all of gold; and around her neck there was a collar of gold, curiously garnished with a net-work of delicate chains, to which were pendants of pearl. The edges of her eyelids were painted, and the tips of her fingers stained. Her hair fell in two long plaits down her back. A curled lock rested upon each cheek in front of the ear. Altogether it would have been impossible to deny her grace, refinement, and beauty.

"Very pretty, my Tirzah, very pretty!" he said, with animation.

"The song?" she asked.

"Yes—and the singer, too. It has the conceit of a Greek. Where did you get it?"

"You remember the Greek who sang in the theatre last month? They said he used to be a singer at the court for Herod and his sister Salome. He came out just after an exhibition of wrestlers, when the house was full of noise. At his first note everything became so quiet that I heard every word. I got the song from him."

"But he sang in Greek."

"And I in Hebrew."

"Ah, yes. I am proud of my little sister. Have you another as good?"

"Very many. But let them go now. Amrah sent me to tell you she will bring you your breakfast, and that you need not come down. She should be here by this time. She thinks you sick—that a dreadful accident happened you yesterday. What was it? Tell me, and I will help Amrah doctor you. She knows

the cures of the Egyptians, who were always a stupid set; but I have a great many recipes of the Arabs, who—"

"Are even more stupid than the Egyptians," he said, shaking his head.

"Do you think so? Very well, then," she replied, almost without pause, and putting her hands to her left ear. "We will have nothing to do with any of them. I have here what is much surer and better—the amulet which was given to some of our people — I cannot tell when, it was so far back—by a Persian magician. See, the inscription is almost worn out."

She offered him the ear-ring, which he took, looked at, and handed back, laughing.

"If I were dying, Tirzah, I could not use the charm. It is a relic of idolatry, forbidden every believing son and daughter of Abraham. Take it, but do not wear it any more."

"Forbidden! Not so," she said. "Our father's mother wore it I do not know how many Sabbaths in her life. It has cured I do not know how many people — more than three, anyhow. It is approved—look, here is the mark of the rabbis."

"I have no faith in amulets."

She raised her eyes to his in astonishment.

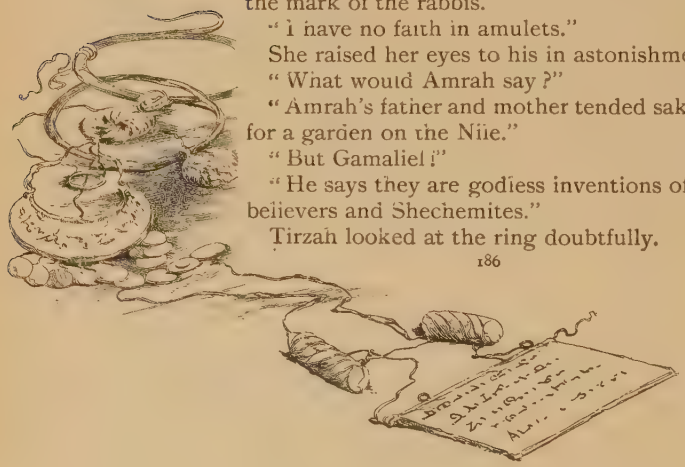
"What would Amrah say?"

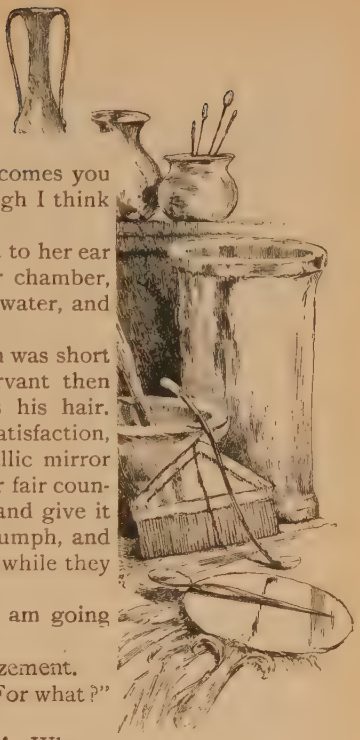
"Amrah's father and mother tended sakiyeh for a garden on the Nile."

"But Gamaliel!"

"He says they are godless inventions of unbelievers and Shechemites."

Tirzah looked at the ring doubtfully.





"What shall I do with it?"

"Wear it, my little sister. It becomes you—it helps make you beautiful, though I think you that without help."

Satisfied, she returned the amulet to her ear just as Amrah entered the summer chamber, bearing a platter, with wash-bowl, water, and napkins.

Not being a Pharisee, the ablution was short and simple with Judah. The servant then went out, leaving Tirzah to dress his hair. When a lock was disposed to her satisfaction, she would unloose the small metallic mirror which, as was the fashion among her fair countrywomen, she wore at her girdle, and give it to him, that he might see the triumph, and how handsome it made him. Meanwhile they kept up their conversation.

"What do you think Tirzah?—I am going away."

She dropped her hands with amazement.

"Going away! When? Where? For what?"

He laughed.

"Three questions, all in a breath! What a body you are!" Next instant he became serious. "You know the law requires me to follow some occupation. Our good father set me an example. Even you would despise me if I spent in idleness the results of his industry and knowledge. I am going to Rome."

"Oh, I will go with you."

"You must stay with mother. If both of us leave her she will die."

The brightness faded from her face.

"Ah, yes, yes! But—must you go? Here in Jerusalem you can learn all that is needed to be a merchant—if that is what you are thinking of."

"But that is not what I am thinking of. The law does not require the son to be what the father was."

"What else can you be?"

"A soldier," he replied, with a certain pride of voice.

Tears came into her eyes.

"You will be killed."

"If God's will, be it so. But, Tirzah, the soldiers are not all killed."

She threw her arms around his neck, as if to hold him back.

"We are so happy! Stay at home, my brother."

"Home cannot always be what it is. You yourself will be going away before long."

"Never!"

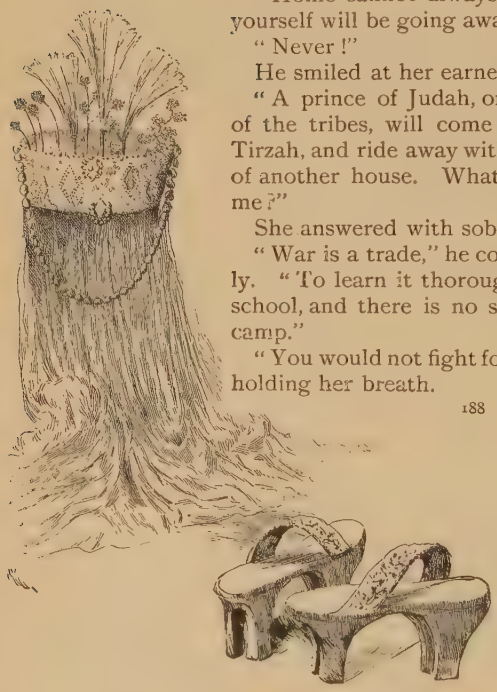
He smiled at her earnestness.

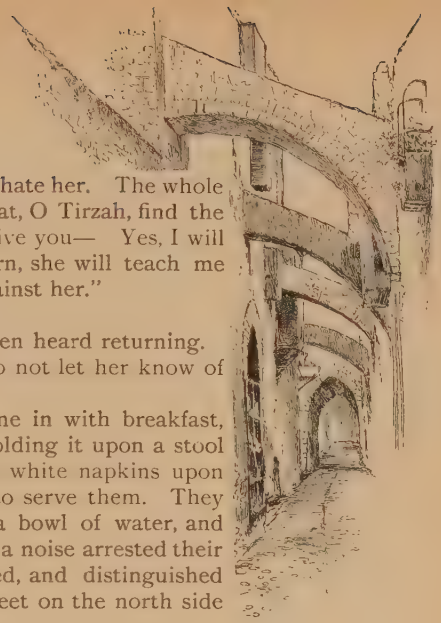
"A prince of Judah, or some other of one of the tribes, will come soon and claim my Tirzah, and ride away with her, to be the light of another house. What will then become of me?"

She answered with sobs.

"War is a trade," he continued, more soberly. "To learn it thoroughly, one must go to school, and there is no school like a Roman camp."

"You would not fight for Rome?" she asked, holding her breath.





"And you—even you hate her. The whole world hates her. In that, O Tirzah, find the reason of the answer I give you— Yes, I will fight for her, if, in return, she will teach me how one day to fight against her."

"When will you go?"

Amrah's steps were then heard returning.

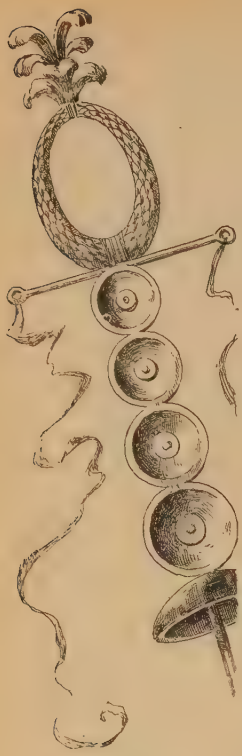
"Hist!" he said. "Do not let her know of what I am thinking."

The faithful slave came in with breakfast, and placed the waiter holding it upon a stool before them; then, with white napkins upon her arm, she remained to serve them. They dipped their fingers in a bowl of water, and were rinsing them, when a noise arrested their attention. They listened, and distinguished martial music in the street on the north side of the house.

"Soldiers from the Prætorium! I must see them," he cried, springing from the divan, and running out.

In a moment more he was leaning over the parapet of tiles which guarded the roof at the extreme north-east corner, so absorbed that he did not notice Tirzah by his side, resting one hand upon his shoulder.

Their position—the roof being the highest one in the locality—commanded the house-tops eastward as far as the huge, irregular Tower of Antonia, which has been already mentioned as a citadel for the garrison and military headquarters for the governor. The street, not more than ten feet wide, was spanned here and there by bridges, open and covered,



which, like the roofs along the way, were beginning to be occupied by men, women, and children, called out by the music. The word is used, though it is hardly fitting; what the people heard when they came forth was rather an uproar of trumpets and the shriller lituï so delightful to the soldiers.

The array after a while came into view of the two upon the house of the Hurs. First, a vanguard of the light-armed—mostly slingers and bowmen — marching with wide intervals between their ranks and files; next a body of heavy-armed infantry, bearing large shields, and hastæ longæ, or spears identical with those used in the duels before Ilium; then the musicians, and then an officer riding alone, but followed closely by a guard of cavalry; after them again, a column of infantry, also heavy-armed, which, moving in close order, crowded the street from wall to wall, and appeared to be without end.

The brawny limbs of the men; the cadenced motion from right to left of the shields; the sparkle of scales, buckles, and breastplates and helms, all perfectly burnished; the plumes nodding above the tall crests; the sway of ensigns and iron-shod spears; the bold, confident step, exactly timed and measured; the demeanor, so grave, yet so watchful; the machine-like unity of the whole moving mass—made an impression upon Judah, but as something felt rather than seen. Two objects fixed his attention—the eagle of the legion first—a gilded effigy perched on a tall shaft, with wings

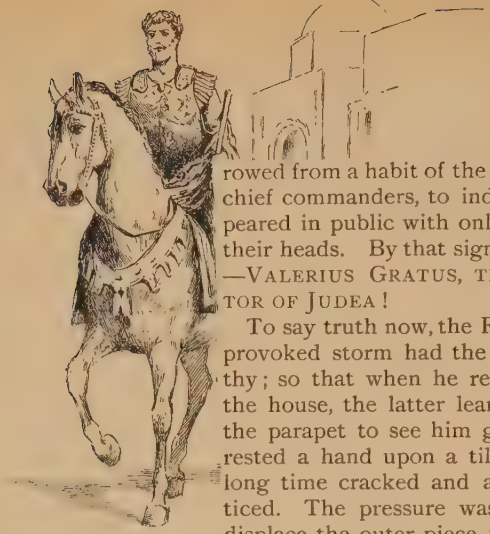
out-spread until they met above its head. He knew that, when brought from its chamber in the Tower, it had been received with divine honors.

The officer riding alone in the midst of the column was the other attraction. His head was bare; otherwise he was in full armor. At his left hip he wore a short sword; in his hand, however, he carried a truncheon, which looked like a roll of white paper. He sat upon a purple cloth instead of a saddle, and that, and a bridle with a forestall of gold and reins of yellow silk broadly fringed at the lower edge, completed the housings of the horse.

While the man was yet in the distance, Judah observed that his presence was sufficient to throw the people looking at him into angry excitement. They would lean over the parapets or stand boldly out, and shake their fists at him; they followed him with loud cries, and spit at him as he passed under the bridges; the women even flung their sandals, sometimes with such good effect as to hit him. When he was nearer, the yells became distinguishable — "Robber, tyrant, dog of a Roman! Away with Ishmael! Give us back our Hannas!"

When quite near, Judah could see that, as was but natural, the man did not share the indifference so superbly shown by the soldiers; his face was dark and sullen, and the glances he occasionally cast at his persecutors were full of menace; the very timid shrank from them.

Now the lad had heard of the custom, bor-



rowed from a habit of the first Cæsar, by which chief commanders, to indicate their rank, appeared in public with only a laurel vine upon their heads. By that sign he knew this officer —VALERIUS GRATUS, THE NEW PROCURATOR OF JUDEA!

To say truth now, the Roman under the unprovoked storm had the young Jew's sympathy; so that when he reached the corner of the house, the latter leaned yet farther over the parapet to see him go by, and in the act rested a hand upon a tile which had been a long time cracked and allowed to go unnoticed. The pressure was strong enough to displace the outer piece, which started to fall. A thrill of horror shot through the youth. He reached out to catch the missile. In appearance the motion was exactly that of one pitching something from him. The effort failed—nay, it served to push the descending fragment farther out over the wall. He shouted with all his might. The soldiers of the guard looked up; so did the great man, and that moment the missile struck him, and he fell from his seat as dead.

The cohort halted; the guards leaped from their horses, and hastened to cover the chief with their shields. On the other hand, the people who witnessed the affair, never doubting that the blow had been purposely dealt, cheered the lad as he yet stooped in full view over the parapet, transfixed by what he beheld, and by anticipation of the consequences flashed all too plainly upon him.

A mischievous spirit flew with incredible speed from roof to roof along the line of march, seizing the people, and urging them all alike. They laid hands upon the parapets and tore up the tiling and the sunburnt mud of which the house-tops were for the most part made, and with blind fury began to fling them upon the legionaries halted below. A battle then ensued. Discipline, of course, prevailed. The struggle, the slaughter, the skill of one side, the desperation of the other, are alike unnecessary to our story. Let us look rather to the wretched author of it all.

He arose from the parapet, his face very pale.

"O Tirzah, Tirzah! What will become of us?"

She had not seen the occurrence below, but was listening to the shouting and watching the mad activity of the people in view on the houses. Something terrible was going on, she knew; but what it was, or the cause, or that she or any of those dear to her were in danger, she did not know.

"What has happened? What does it all mean?" she asked, in sudden alarm.

"I have killed the Roman governor. The tile fell upon him."

An unseen hand appeared to sprinkle her face with the dust of ashes—it grew white so instantly. She put her arm around him, and looked wistfully, but without a word, into his eyes. His fears had passed to her, and the sight of them gave him strength.

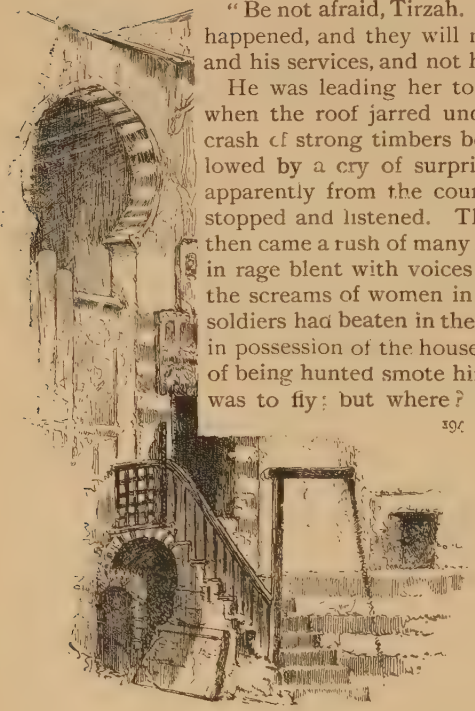
"I did not do it purposely, Tirzah—it was an accident," he said, more calmly.

"What will they do?" she asked.

He looked off over the tumult momentarily deepening in the street and on the roofs, and thought of the sullen countenance of Gratus. If he were not dead, where would his vengeance stop? And if he were dead, to what height of fury would not the violence of the people lash the legionaries? To evade an answer, he peered over the parapet again, just as the guard were assisting the Roman to remount his horse.

"He lives, he lives, Tirzah! Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers!"

With that outcry, and a brightened countenance, he drew back and replied to her question.



"Be not afraid, Tirzah. I will explain how it happened, and they will remember our father and his services, and not hurt us."

He was leading her to the summer-house when the roof jarred under their feet, and a crash of strong timbers being burst away, followed by a cry of surprise and agony, arose apparently from the court-yard below. He stopped and listened. The cry was repeated; then came a rush of many feet, and voices lifted in rage blent with voices in prayer; and then the screams of women in mortal terror. The soldiers had beaten in the north gate, and were in possession of the house. The terrible sense of being hunted smote him. His first impulse was to fly; but where? Nothing but wings

would serve him. Tirzah, her eyes wild with fear, caught his arm.

"O Judah, what does it mean?"

The servants were being butchered—and his mother! Was not one of the voices he heard hers? With all the will left him, he said, "Stay here, and wait for me, Tirzah. I will go down and see what is the matter, and come back to you."

His voice was not steady as he wished. She clung closer to him.

Clearer, shriller, no longer a fancy, his mother's cry arose. He hesitated no longer.

"Come, then, let us go."

The terrace or gallery at the foot of the steps was crowded with soldiers. Other soldiers with drawn swords ran in and out of the chambers. At one place a number of women on their knees clung to each other or prayed for mercy. Apart from them, one with torn garments, and long hair streaming over her face, struggled to tear loose from a man all whose strength was tasked to keep his hold. Her cries were shrillest of all; cutting through the clamor, they had risen distinguishably to the roof. To her Judah sprang—his steps were long and swift, almost a winged flight—"Mother, mother!" he shouted. She stretched her hands towards him; but when almost touching them he was seized and forced aside. Then he heard some one say, speaking loudly,

"That is he!"

Judah looked, and saw—Messala.

"What, the assassin—that?" said a tall man,

in legionary armor of beautiful finish. "Why, he is but a boy."

"Gods!" replied Messala, not forgetting his drawl. "A new philosophy! What would Seneca say to the proposition that a man must be old before he can hate enough to kill? You have him; and that is his mother; yonder his sister. You have the whole family."

For love of them, Judah forgot his quarrel.

"Help them, O my Messala! Remember our childhood and help them. I—Judah—pray you."

Messala affected not to hear.

"I cannot be of further use to you," he said to the officer. "There is richer entertainment in the street. Down Eros, up Mars!"

With the last words he disappeared. Judah understood him, and, in the bitterness of his soul, prayed to Heaven.

"In the hour of thy vengeance, O Lord," he said, "be mine the hand to put it upon him!"

By great exertion, he drew nearer the officer.

"O sir, the woman you hear is my mother. Spare her, spare my sister yonder. God is just, he will give you mercy for mercy."

The man appeared to be moved.

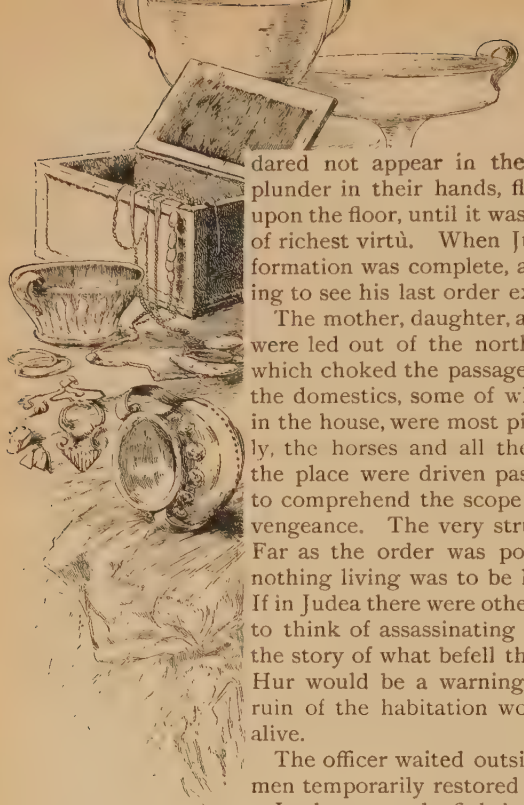
"To the Tower with the women!" he shouted, "but do them no harm. I will demand them of you." Then to those holding Judah, he said, "Get cords and bind his hands, and take him to the street. His punishment is reserved."

The mother was carried away. The little Tirzah, in her home attire, stupefied with fear,

went passively with her keepers. Judah gave each of them a last look, and covered his face with his hands, as if to possess himself of the scene fadelessly. He may have shed tears, though no one saw them.

There took place in him then what may be justly called the wonder of life. The thoughtful reader of these pages has ere this discerned enough to know that the young Jew in disposition was gentle even to womanliness —a result that seldom fails the habit of loving and being loved. The circumstances through which he had come had made no call upon the harsher elements of his nature, if such he had. At times he had felt the stir and impulses of ambition, but they had been like the formless dreams of a child walking by the sea and gazing at the coming and going of stately ships. But now, if we can imagine an idol, sensible of the worship it was accustomed to, dashed suddenly from its altar, and lying amid the wreck of its little world of love, an idea may be had of what had befallen the young Ben-Hur, and of its effect upon his being. Yet there was no sign, nothing to indicate that he had undergone a change, except that when he raised his head, and held his arms out to be bound, the bend of the Cupid's bow had vanished from his lips. In that instant he had put off childhood and become a man.

A trumpet sounded in the court-yard. With the cessation of the call, the gallery was cleared of the soldiery; many of whom, as they



dared not appear in the ranks with visible plunder in their hands, flung what they had upon the floor, until it was strewn with articles of richest virtù. When Judah descended, the formation was complete, and the officer waiting to see his last order executed.

The mother, daughter, and entire household were led out of the north gate, the ruins of which choked the passage-way. The cries of the domestics, some of whom had been born in the house, were most pitiable. When, finally, the horses and all the dumb tenantry of the place were driven past him, Judah began to comprehend the scope of the procurator's vengeance. The very structure was devoted. Far as the order was possible of execution, nothing living was to be left within its walls. If in Judea there were others desperate enough to think of assassinating a Roman governor, the story of what befell the princely family of Hur would be a warning to them, while the ruin of the habitation would keep the story alive.

The officer waited outside while a detail of men temporarily restored the gate.

In the street the fighting had almost ceased. Upon the houses here and there clouds of dust told where the struggle was yet prolonged. The cohort was, for the most part, standing at rest; its splendor, like its ranks, in nowise diminished. Borne past the point of care for himself, Judah had heart for nothing in view but the prisoners, among whom he looked in vain for his mother and Tirzah.

Suddenly, from the earth where she had been lying, a woman arose and started swiftly back to the gate. Some of the guards reached out to seize her, and a great shout followed their failure. She ran to Judah, and, dropping down, clasped his knees, the coarse black hair powdered with dust veiling her eyes.

"O Amrah, good Amrah," he said to her, "God help you; I cannot."

She could not speak.

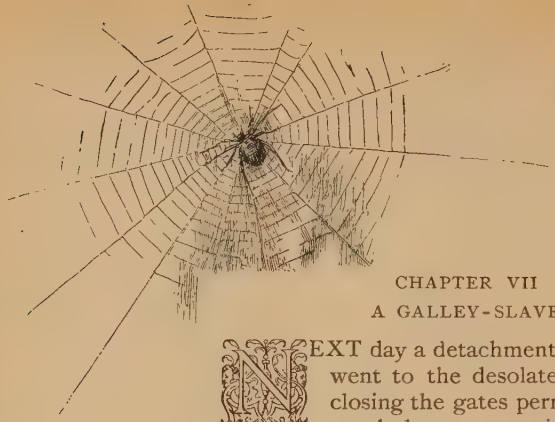
He bent down, and whispered, "Live, Amrah, for Tirzah and my mother. They will come back, and—"

A soldier drew her away; whereupon she sprang up and rushed through the gate-way and passage into the vacant court-yard.

"Let her go," the officer shouted. "We will seal the house, and she will starve."

The men resumed their work, and when it was finished there, passed round to the west side. That gate was also secured, after which the palace of the Hurs was lost to use.

The cohort at length marched back to the Tower, where the procurator stayed to recover from his hurts and dispose of his prisoners. On the tenth day following he visited the Market-place.



CHAPTER VII

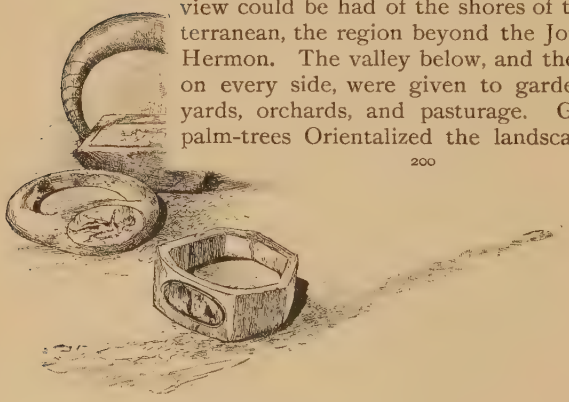
A GALLEY-SLAVE

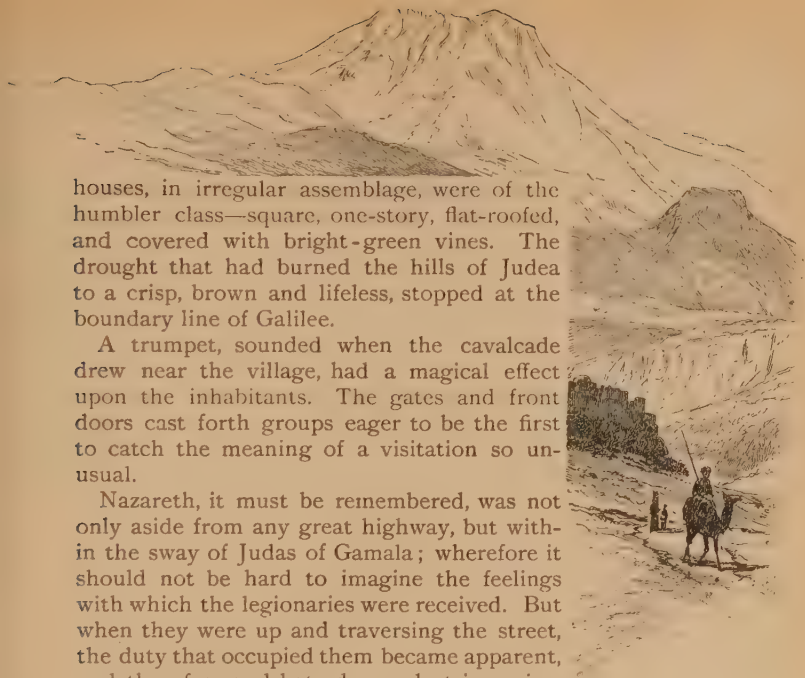
NEXT day a detachment of legionaries went to the desolated palace, and, closing the gates permanently, plastered the corners with wax, and at the sides nailed a notice in Latin:

"THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF
THE EMPEROR."

In the haughty Roman idea, the sententious announcement was thought sufficient for the purpose—and it was.

The day after that again, about noon, a decurion with his command of ten horsemen approached Nazareth from the south — that is, from the direction of Jerusalem. The place was then a straggling village, perched on a hill-side, and so insignificant that its one street was little more than a path well beaten by the coming and going of flocks and herds. The great plain of Esdraelon crept close to it on the south, and from the height on the west a view could be had of the shores of the Mediterranean, the region beyond the Jordan, and Hermon. The valley below, and the country on every side, were given to gardens, vineyards, orchards, and pasturage. Groves of palm-trees Orientalized the landscape. The



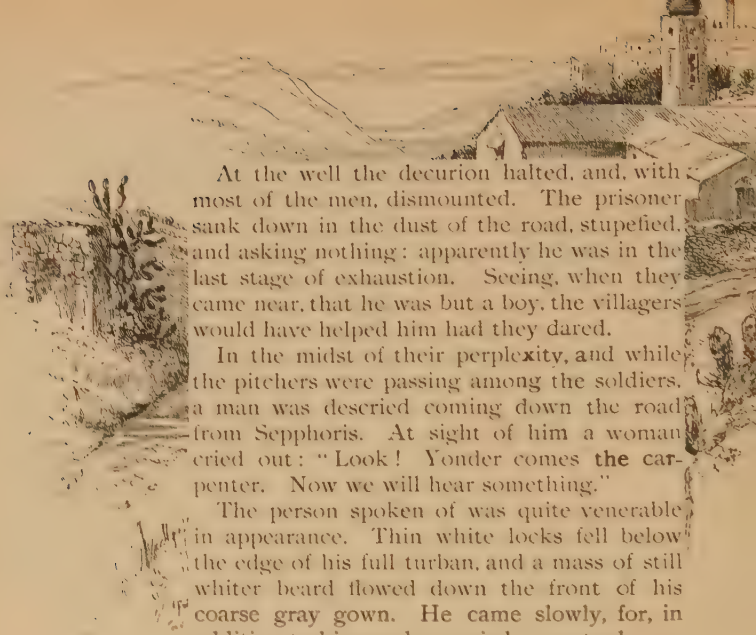


houses, in irregular assemblage, were of the humbler class—square, one-story, flat-roofed, and covered with bright-green vines. The drought that had burned the hills of Judea to a crisp, brown and lifeless, stopped at the boundary line of Galilee.

A trumpet, sounded when the cavalcade drew near the village, had a magical effect upon the inhabitants. The gates and front doors cast forth groups eager to be the first to catch the meaning of a visitation so unusual.

Nazareth, it must be remembered, was not only aside from any great highway, but within the sway of Judas of Gamala; wherefore it should not be hard to imagine the feelings with which the legionaries were received. But when they were up and traversing the street, the duty that occupied them became apparent, and then fear and hatred were lost in curiosity, under the impulse of which the people, knowing there must be a halt at the well in the north-eastern part of the town, quit their gates and doors, and closed in after the procession.

A prisoner whom the horsemen were guarding was the object of curiosity. He was afoot, bareheaded, half naked, his hands bound behind him. A thong fixed to his wrists was looped over the neck of a horse. The dust went with the party when in movement, wrapping him in yellow fog, sometimes in a dense cloud. He dropped forward, foot-sore and faint. The villagers could see he was young.



At the well the decurion halted, and, with most of the men, dismounted. The prisoner sank down in the dust of the road, stupefied, and asking nothing: apparently he was in the last stage of exhaustion. Seeing, when they came near, that he was but a boy, the villagers would have helped him had they dared.

In the midst of their perplexity, and while the pitchers were passing among the soldiers, a man was descried coming down the road from Sepphoris. At sight of him a woman cried out: "Look! Yonder comes the carpenter. Now we will hear something."

The person spoken of was quite venerable in appearance. Thin white locks fell below the edge of his full turban, and a mass of still whiter beard flowed down the front of his coarse gray gown. He came slowly, for, in addition to his age, he carried some tools—an axe, a saw, and a drawing-knife, all very rude and heavy—and had evidently travelled some distance without rest.

He stopped close by to survey the assemblage.

"O Rabbi, good Rabbi Joseph!" cried a woman, running to him. "Here is a prisoner; come ask the soldiers about him, that we may know who he is, and what he has done, and what they are going to do with him."

The rabbi's face remained stolid; he glanced at the prisoner, however, and presently went to the officer.

"The peace of the Lord be with you!" he said, with unbending gravity.

"And that of the gods with you," the decurion replied.

"Are you from Jerusalem?"

"Yes."

"Your prisoner is young."

"In years, yes."

"May I ask what he has done?"

"He is an assassin."

The people repeated the word in astonishment, but Rabbi Joseph pursued his inquest.

"Is he a son of Israel?"

"He is a Jew," said the Roman, dryly.

The wavering pity of the by-standers came back.

"I know nothing of your tribes, but can speak of his family," the speaker continued. "You may have heard of a prince of Jerusalem named Hur—Ben-Hur, they called him. He lived in Herod's day."

"I have seen him," Joseph said.

"Well, this is his son."

Exclamations became general, and the decurion hastened to stop them.

"In the streets of Jerusalem, day before yesterday, he nearly killed the noble Gratus by flinging a tile upon his head from the roof of a palace—his father's, I believe."

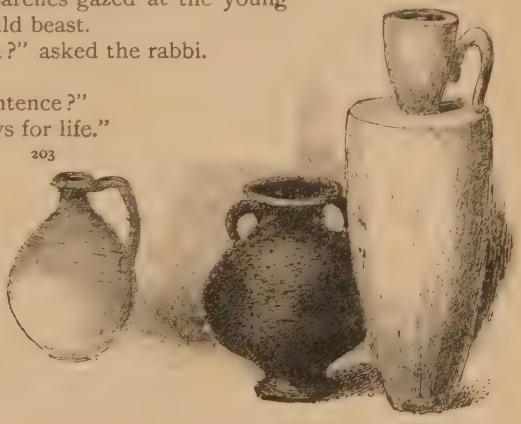
There was a pause in the conversation during which the Nazarenes gazed at the young Ben-Hur as at a wild beast.

"Did he kill him?" asked the rabbi.

"No."

"He is under sentence?"

"Yes—the galleys for life."



"The Lord help him!" said Joseph, for once moved out of his stolidity.

Thereupon a youth who came up with Joseph, but had stood behind him unobserved, laid down an axe he had been carrying, and, going to the great stone standing by the well, took from it a pitcher of water. The action was so quiet that before the guard could interfere, had they been disposed to do so, he was stooping over the prisoner, and offering him drink.

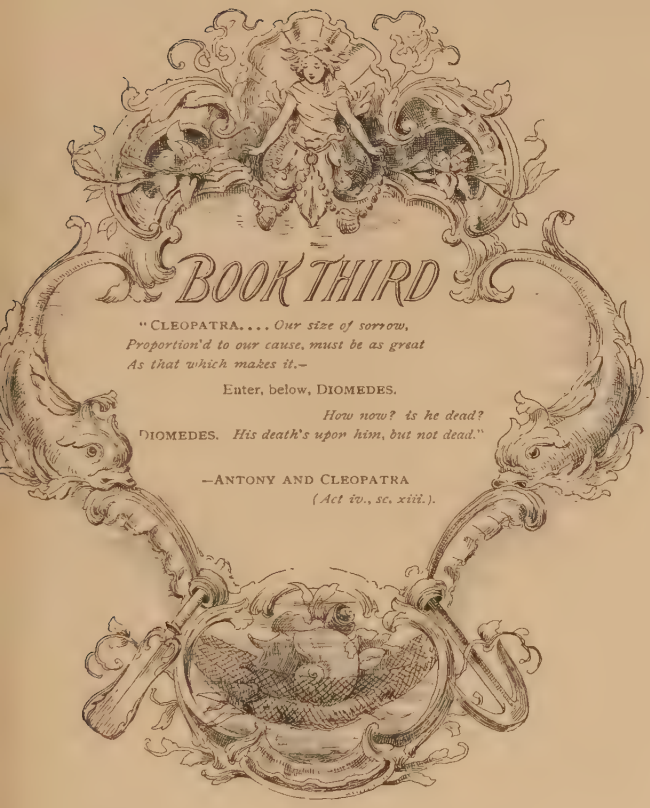
The hand laid kindly upon his shoulder awoke the unfortunate Judah, and, looking up, he saw a face he never forgot—the face of a boy about his own age, shaded by locks of yellowish bright chestnut hair; a face lighted by dark-blue eyes, at the time so soft, so appealing, so full of love and holy purpose, that they had all the power of command and will. The spirit of the Jew, hardened though it was by days and nights of suffering, and so imbittered by wrong that its dreams of revenge took in all the world, melted under the stranger's look, and became as a child's. He put his lips to the pitcher, and drank long and deep. Not a word was said to him, nor did he say a word.

When the draught was finished, the hand that had been resting upon the sufferer's shoulder was placed upon his head, and stayed there in the dusty locks time enough to say a blessing; the stranger then returned the pitcher to its place on the stone, and, taking his axe again, went back to Rabbi Joseph. All eyes went

with him, the decurion's as well as those of the villagers.

This was the end of the scene at the well. When the men had drunk, and the horses, the march was resumed. But the temper of the decurion was not as it had been; he himself raised the prisoner from the dust, and helped him on a horse behind a soldier. The Nazarenes went to their houses—among them Rabbi Joseph and his apprentice.

And so, for the first time, Judah and the son of Mary met and parted.



BOOK THIRD

"CLEOPATRA. . . . *Our size of sorrow,*
Proportion'd to our cause, must be as great
As that which makes it.—

Enter, below, DIOMEDES.

How now? is he dead?

DIOMEDES. *His death's upon him, but not dead.*"

—ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
(Act iv., sc. xiii.).

CHAPTER I

QUINTUS ARRIUS GOES TO SEA

THE city of Misenum gave name to the promontory which it crowned, a few miles south-west of Naples. An account of ruins is all that remains of it now; yet in the year of our Lord 24—to which it is desirable to advance the reader—the place was one of the most important on the western coast of Italy.*

In the year mentioned, a traveller coming to the promontory to regale himself with the view there offered, would have mounted a wall, and, with the city at his back, looked over the bay of Neapolis, as charming then as now; and then, as now, he would have seen the matchless shore, the smoking cone, the sky and waves so softly, deeply blue, Ischia here and Capri yonder; from one to the other and back again, through the purpled air, his gaze would have sported; at last—for the eyes do weary of the beautiful as the palate with sweets—at last it would have dropped upon a spectacle which the modern tourist cannot see—half the reserve navy of Rome astir or at anchor below him. Thus regarded, Misenum

* The Roman government, it will be remembered, had two harbors in which great fleets were constantly kept—Ravenna and Misenum.

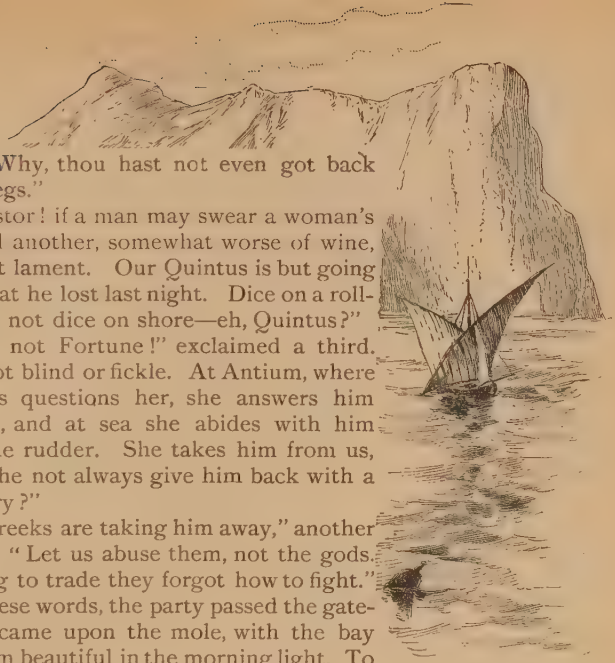
was a very proper place for three masters to meet, and at leisure parcel the world among them.

In the old time, moreover, there was a gateway in the wall at a certain point fronting the sea—an empty gate-way forming the outlet of a street which, after the exit, stretched itself, in the form of a broad mole, out many stadia into the waves.

The watchman on the wall above the gateway was disturbed, one cool September morning, by a party coming down the street in noisy conversation. He gave one look, then settled into his drowse again.

There were twenty or thirty persons in the party, of whom the greater number were slaves with torches, which flamed little and smoked much, leaving on the air the perfume of the Indian nard. The masters walked in advance, arm-in-arm. One of them, apparently fifty years old, slightly bald, and wearing over his scant locks a crown of laurel, seemed, from the attentions paid him, the central object of some affectionate ceremony. They all sported ample togas of white wool broadly bordered with purple. A glance had sufficed the watchman. He knew, without question, they were of high rank, and escorting a friend to ship after a night of festivity. Further explanation will be found in the conversation they carried on.

"No, my Quintus," said one, speaking to him with the crown, "it is ill of Fortune to take thee from us so soon. Only yesterday thou didst return from the seas beyond the



Pillars. Why, thou hast not even got back thy land legs."

"By Castor! if a man may swear a woman's oath," said another, somewhat worse of wine, "let us not lament. Our Quintus is but going to find what he lost last night. Dice on a rolling ship is not dice on shore—eh, Quintus?"

"Abuse not Fortune!" exclaimed a third. "She is not blind or fickle. At Antium, where our Arrius questions her, she answers him with nods, and at sea she abides with him holding the rudder. She takes him from us, but does she not always give him back with a new victory?"

"The Greeks are taking him away," another broke in. "Let us abuse them, not the gods. In learning to trade they forgot how to fight."

With these words, the party passed the gateway, and came upon the mole, with the bay before them beautiful in the morning light. To the veteran sailor the plash of the waves was like a greeting. He drew a long breath, as if the perfume of the water were sweeter than that of the nard, and held his hand aloft.

"My gifts were at Prænestе, not Antium—and see! Wind from the west. Thanks, O Fortune, my mother!" he said, earnestly.

The friends all repeated the exclamation, and the slaves waved their torches.

"She comes—yonder!" he continued, pointing to a galley outside the mole. "What need has a sailor for other mistress? Is your Lucrece more graceful, my Caius?"

He gazed at the coming ship, and justified

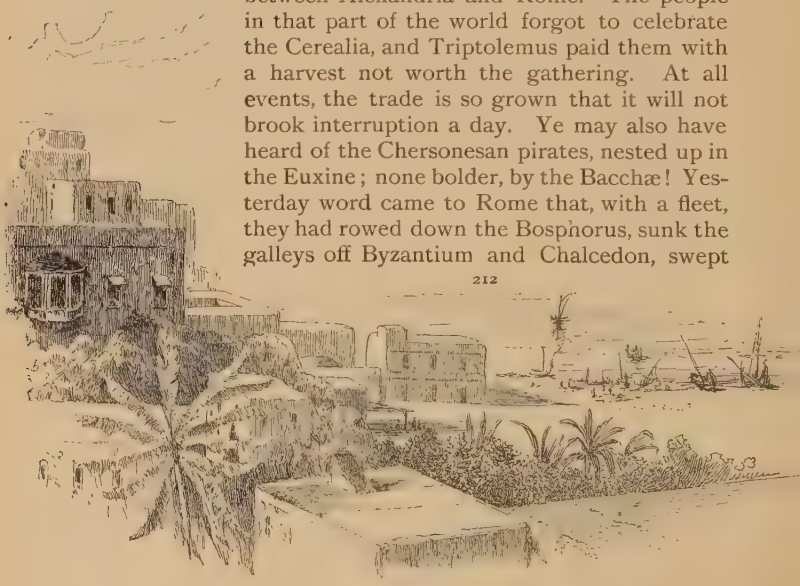
his pride. A white sail was bent to the low mast, and the oars dipped, arose, poised a moment, then dipped again, with wing-like action, and in perfect time.

"Yes, spare the gods," he said, soberly, his eyes fixed upon the vessel. "They send us opportunities. Ours the fault if we fail. And as for the Greeks, you forget, O my Lentulus, the pirates I am going to punish are Greeks. One victory over them is of more account than a hundred over the Africans."

"Then thy way is to the Ægean?"

The sailor's eyes were full of his ship.

"What grace, what freedom! A bird hath not less care for the fretting of the waves. See!" he said, but almost immediately added, "Thy pardon, my Lentulus. I am going to the Ægean; and as my departure is so near, I will tell the occasion—only keep it under the rose. I would not that you abuse the duumvir when next you meet him. He is my friend. The trade between Greece and Alexandria, as ye may have heard, is hardly inferior to that between Alexandria and Rome. The people in that part of the world forgot to celebrate the Cerealia, and Triptolemus paid them with a harvest not worth the gathering. At all events, the trade is so grown that it will not brook interruption a day. Ye may also have heard of the Chersonesan pirates, nested up in the Euxine; none bolder, by the Bacchæ! Yesterday word came to Rome that, with a fleet, they had rowed down the Bosphorus, sunk the galleys off Byzantium and Chalcedon, swept



the Propontis, and, still unsated, burst through into the Ægean. The corn-merchants who have ships in the East Mediterranean are frightened. They had audience with the Emperor himself, and from Ravenna there go today a hundred galleys, and from Misenum"—he paused as if to pique the curiosity of his friends, and ended with an emphatic—"one."

"Happy Quintus! We congratulate thee!"

"The preferment forerunneth promotion. We salute thee duumvir; nothing less."

"Quintus Arrius, the duumvir, hath a better sound than Quintus Arrius, the tribune."

In such manner they showered him with congratulations.

"I am glad with the rest," said the bibulous friend, "very glad; but I must be practical, O my duumvir; and not until I know if promotion will help thee to knowledge of the tesseræ will I have an opinion as to whether the gods mean thee ill or good in this—this business."

"Thanks, many thanks!" Arrius replied, speaking to them collectively. "Had ye but lanterns, I would say ye were augurs. Perpol! I will go further, and show what master diviners ye are! See—and read."

From the folds of his toga he drew a roll of paper, and passed it to them, saying, "Received while at table last night from—Sejanus."

The name was already a great one in the Roman world; great, and not so infamous as it afterwards became.

"Sejanus!" they exclaimed, with one voice, closing in to read what the minister had written.

"Sejanus to C. Cæcilius Rufus, Duumvir.

"ROME, XIX. Kal. Sept.

"Cæsar hath good report of Quintus Arrius, the tribune. In particular he hath heard of his valor, manifested in the western seas; insomuch that it is his will that the said Quintus be transferred instantly to the East.

"It is our Cæsar's will, further, that you cause a hundred triremes, of the first class, and full appointment, to be despatched without delay against the pirates who have appeared in the Ægean, and that Quintus be sent to command the fleet so despatched.

"Details are thine, my Cæcilius.

"The necessity is urgent, as thou wilt be advised by the reports enclosed for thy perusal and the information of the said Quintus. SEJANUS."

Arrius gave little heed to the reading. As the ship drew more plainly out of the perspective, she became more and more an attraction to him. The look with which he watched her was that of an enthusiast. At length he tossed the loosened folds of his toga in the air; in reply to the signal, over the aplustre, or fan-like fixture at the stern of the vessel, a scarlet flag was displayed; while several sailors appeared upon the bulwarks, and swung themselves hand over hand up the ropes to the antenna, or yard, and furled the sail. The bow was put round, and the time of the oars increased one-half; so that at racing speed she bore down directly towards him and his friends. He observed the manœuvring with a percepti-

ble brightening of the eyes. Her instant answer to the rudder, and the steadiness with which she kept her course, were especially noticeable as virtues to be relied upon in action.

"By the Nymphæ!" said one of the friends, giving back the roll, "we may not longer say our friend will be great; he is already great. Our love will now have famous things to feed upon. What more hast thou for us?"

"Nothing more," Arrius replied. "What ye have of the affair is by this time old news in Rome, especially between the palace and the Forum. The duumvir is discreet; what I am to do, where go to find my fleet, he will tell on the ship, where a sealed package is waiting me. If, however, ye have offerings for any of the altars to-day, pray the gods for a friend plying oar and sail somewhere in the direction of Sicily. But she is here, and will come to," he said, reverting to the vessel. "I have interest in her masters; they will sail and fight with me. It is not an easy thing to lay ship side on a shore like this; so let us judge their training and skill."

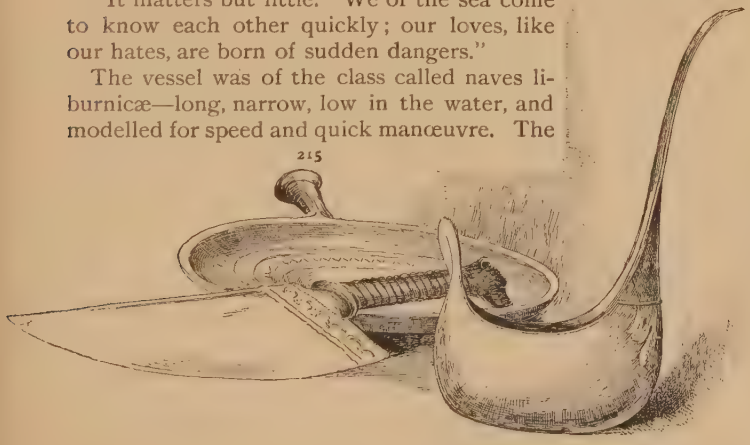
"What, is she new to thee?"

"I never saw her before; and, as yet, I know not if she will bring me one acquaintance."

"Is that well?"

"It matters but little. We of the sea come to know each other quickly; our loves, like our hates, are born of sudden dangers."

The vessel was of the class called naves liburnicæ—long, narrow, low in the water, and modelled for speed and quick manœuvre. The

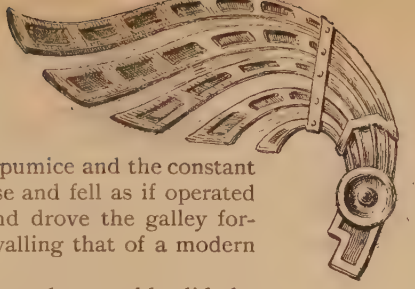


bow was beautiful. A jet of water spun from its foot as she came on, sprinkling all the prow, which rose in graceful curvature twice a man's stature above the plane of the deck. Upon the bending of the sides were figures of Tritons blowing shells. Below the bow, fixed to the keel, and projecting forward under the water-line, was the rostrum, or beak, a device of solid wood, reinforced and armed with iron, in action used as a ram. A stout moulding extended from the bow the full length of the ship's sides, defining the bulwarks, which were tastefully crenellated; below the moulding, in three rows, each covered with a cap or shield of bull-hide, were the holes in which the oars were worked—sixty on the right, sixty on the left. In further ornamentation, caducei leaned against the lofty prow. Two immense ropes passing across the bow marked the number of anchors stowed on the foredeck.

The simplicity of the upper works declared the oars the chief dependence of the crew. A mast, set a little forward of midship, was held by fore and back stays and shrouds fixed to rings on the inner side of the bulwarks. The tackle was that required for the management of one great square sail and the yard to which it was hung. Above the bulwarks the deck was visible.

Save the sailors who had reefed the sail, and yet lingered on the yard, but one man was to be seen by the party on the mole, and he stood by the prow helmeted and with a shield.

The hundred and twenty oaken blades, kept



white and shining by pumice and the constant wash of the waves, rose and fell as if operated by the same hand, and drove the galley forward with a speed rivalling that of a modern steamer.

So rapidly, and apparently so rashly, did she come that the landsmen of the tribune's party were alarmed. Suddenly the man by the prow raised his hand with a peculiar gesture; whereupon all the oars flew up, poised a moment in the air, then fell straight down. The water boiled and bubbled about them; the galley shook in every timber, and stopped as if scared. Another gesture of the hand, and again the oars arose, feathered, and fell; but this time those on the right, dropping towards the stern, pushed forward; while those on the left, dropping towards the bow, pulled backward. Three times the oars thus pushed and pulled against each other. Round to the right the ship swung as upon a pivot; then, caught by the wind, she settled gently broadside to the mole.

The movement brought the stern to view, with all its garniture—Tritons like those at the bow; name in large raised letters; the rudder at the side; the elevated platform upon which the helmsman sat, a stately figure in full armor, his hand upon the rudder-rope; and the aplustre, high, gilt, carved, and bent over the helmsman like a great runcinate leaf.

In the midst of the rounding-to, a trumpet was blown brief and shrill, and from the hatchways out poured the marines, all in superb

equipment, brazen helms, burnished shields and javelins. While the fighting-men thus went to quarters as for action, the sailors proper climbed the shrouds and perched themselves along the yard. The officers and musicians took their posts. There was no shouting or needless noise. When the oars touched the mole, a bridge was sent out from the helmsman's deck. Then the tribune turned to his party and said, with a gravity he had not before shown:

"Duty now, O my friends."

He took the chaplet from his head and gave it to the dice-player.

"Take thou the myrtle, O favorite of the tesseræ!" he said. "If I return, I will seek my sestertii again; if I am not victor, I will not return. Hang the crown in thy atrium."

To the company he opened his arms, and they came one by one and received his parting embrace.

"The gods go with thee, O Quintus!" they said.

"Farewell," he replied.

To the slaves waving their torches he waved his hand; then he turned to the waiting ship, beautiful with ordered ranks and crested helms and shields and javelins. As he stepped upon the bridge, the trumpets sounded, and over the aplustre rose the vexillum purpureum, or pennant of a commander of a fleet.

CHAPTER II

AT THE OAR

THE tribune, standing upon the helmsman's deck with the order of the duumvir open in his hand, spoke to the chief of the rowers.*

"What force hast thou?"

"Of oarsmen, two hundred and fifty-two; ten supernumeraries."

"Making reliefs of—"

"Eighty-four."

"And thy habit?"

"It has been to take off and put on every two hours."

The tribune mused a moment.

"The division is hard, and I will reform it, but not now. The oars may not rest day or night."

Then to the sailing-master he said:

"The wind is fair. Let the sail help the oars."

When the two thus addressed were gone, he turned to the chief pilot.†

"What service hast thou had?"

"Two-and-thirty years."

"In what seas chiefly?"

"Between our Rome and the East."

"Thou art the man I would have chosen."

* Called hortator. † Called rector.

The tribune looked at his orders again.

"Past the Camponellan cape, the course will be to Messina. Beyond that, follow the bend of the Calabrian shore till Melito is on thy left, then— Knowest thou the stars that govern in the Ionian Sea?"

"I know them well."

"Then from Melito course eastward for Cythera. The gods willing, I will not anchor until in the Bay of Antemona. The duty is urgent. I rely upon thee."

A prudent man was Arrius — prudent, and of the class which, while enriching the altars at Præneste and Antium, was of opinion, nevertheless, that the favor of the blind goddess depended more upon the votary's care and judgment than upon his gifts and vows. All night as master of the feast he had sat at table drinking and playing; yet the odor of the sea returned him to the mood of the sailor, and he would not rest until he knew his ship. Knowledge leaves no room for chances. Having begun with the chief of the rowers, the sailing-master, and the pilot, in company with the other officers—the commander of the marines, the keeper of the stores, the master of the machines, the overseer of the kitchen or fires—he passed through the several quarters. Nothing escaped his inspection. When he was through, of the community crowded within the narrow walls he alone knew perfectly all there was of material preparation for the voyage and its possible incidents; and, finding the preparation complete, there was left him but one thing

further—thorough knowledge of the personnel of his command. As this was the most delicate and difficult part of his task, requiring much time, he set about it his own way.

At noon that day the galley was skimming the sea off Pæstum. The wind was yet from the west, filling the sail to the master's content. The watches had been established. On the foredeck the altar had been set and sprinkled with salt and barley, and before it the tribune had offered solemn prayers to Jove and to Neptune and all the Oceanidæ, and, with vows, poured the wine and burned the incense. And now, the better to study his men he was seated in the great cabin, a very martial figure.

The cabin, it should be stated, was the central compartment of the galley, in extent quite sixty-five by thirty feet, and lighted by three broad hatchways. A row of stanchions ran from end to end, supporting the roof, and near the centre the mast was visible, all bristling with axes and spears and javelins. To each hatchway there were double stairs descending right and left, with a pivotal arrangement at the top to allow the lower ends to be hitched to the ceiling; and, as these were now raised, the compartment had the appearance of a skylighted hall.

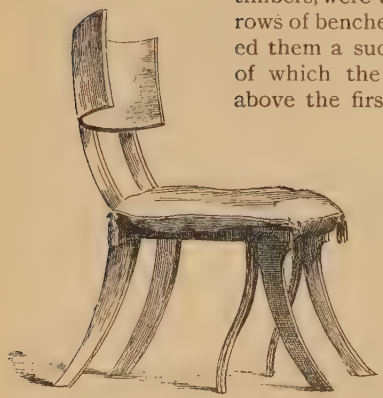
The reader will understand readily that this was the heart of the ship, the home of all aboard — eating-room, sleeping-chamber, field of exercise, lounging-place off duty — uses made possible by the laws which reduced life

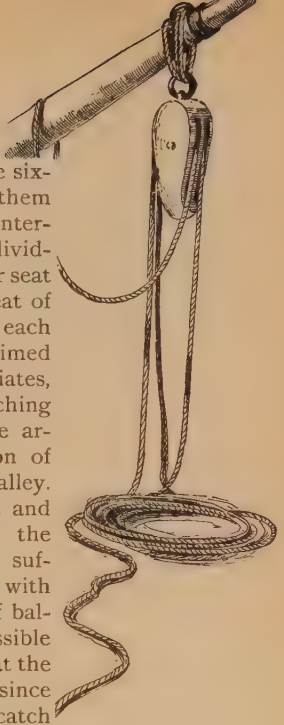
there to minute details and a routine relentless as death.

At the after-end of the cabin there was a platform, reached by several steps. Upon it the chief of the rowers sat; in front of him a sounding-table, upon which, with a gavel, he beat time for the oarsmen; at his right a clepsydra, or water-clock, to measure the reliefs and watches. Above him, on a higher platform, well guarded by gilded railing, the tribune had his quarters, overlooking everything, and furnished with a couch, a table, and a cathedra, or chair, cushioned, and with arms and high back —articles which the imperial dispensation permitted of the utmost elegance.

Thus at ease, lounging in the great chair, swaying with the motion of the vessel, the military cloak half draping his tunic, sword in belt, Arrius kept watchful eye over his command, and was as closely watched by them. He saw critically everything in view, but dwelt longest upon the rowers. The reader would doubtless have done the same: only he would have looked with much sympathy, while, as is the habit with masters, the tribune's mind ran forward of what he saw, inquiring for results.

The spectacle was simple enough of itself. Along the sides of the cabin, fixed to the ship's timbers, were what at first appeared to be three rows of benches; a closer view, however, showed them a succession of rising banks, in each of which the second bench was behind and above the first one, and the third above and





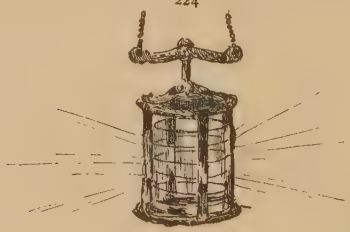
behind the second. To accommodate the sixty rowers on a side, the space devoted to them permitted nineteen banks separated by intervals of one yard, with a twentieth bank divided so that what would have been its upper seat or bench was directly above the lower seat of the first bank. The arrangement gave each rower when at work ample room, if he timed his movements with those of his associates, the principle being that of soldiers marching with cadenced step in close order. The arrangement also allowed a multiplication of banks, limited only by the length of the galley.

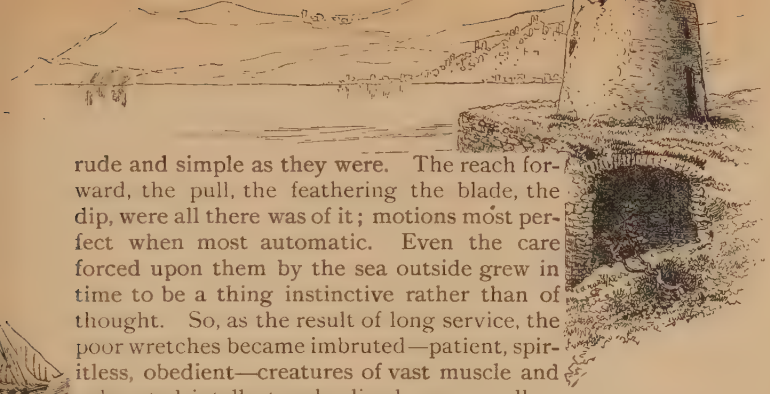
As to the rowers, those upon the first and second benches sat, while those upon the third, having longer oars to work, were suffered to stand. The oars were loaded with lead in the handles, and near the point of balance hung to pliable thongs, making possible the delicate touch called feathering, but, at the same time, increasing the need of skill, since an eccentric wave might at any moment catch a heedless fellow and hurl him from his seat. Each oar-hole was a vent through which the laborer opposite it had his plenty of sweet air. Light streamed down upon him from the grating which formed the floor of the passage between the deck and the bulwark over his head. In some respects, therefore, the condition of the men might have been much worse. Still, it must not be imagined that there was any pleasantness in their lives. Communication between them was not allowed. Day after day they filled their places without speech; in

hours of labor they could not see each other's faces; their short respites were given to sleep and the snatching of food. They never laughed; no one ever heard one of them sing. What is the use of tongues when a sigh or a groan will tell all men feel while, perforce, they think in silence? Existence with the poor wretches was like a stream underground sweeping slowly, laboriously on to its outlet, wherever that might chance to be.

O Son of Mary! The sword has now a heart—and thine the glory! So now; but, in the days of which we are writing, for captivity there was drudgery on walls, and in the streets and mines, and the galleys both of war and commerce were insatiable. When Druilius won the first sea-fight for his country, Romans plied the oars, and the glory was to the rower not less than the marine. These benches which now we are trying to see as they were testified to the change come with conquest, and illustrated both the policy and the prowess of Rome. Nearly all the nations had sons there, mostly prisoners of war, chosen for their brawn and endurance. In one place a Briton; before him a Libyan; behind him a Crimean. Elsewhere a Scythian, a Gaul, and a Thebasite. Roman convicts cast down to consort with Goths and Longobardi, Jews, Ethiopians, and barbarians from the shores of Mæotis. Here an Athenian, there a red-haired savage from Hibernia, yonder blue-eyed giants of the Cimbri.

In the labor of the rowers there was not enough art to give occupation to their minds,





rude and simple as they were. The reach forward, the pull, the feathering the blade, the dip, were all there was of it; motions most perfect when most automatic. Even the care forced upon them by the sea outside grew in time to be a thing instinctive rather than of thought. So, as the result of long service, the poor wretches became imbruted—patient, spiritless, obedient—creatures of vast muscle and exhausted intellects, who lived upon recollections generally few but dear, and at last lowered into the semiconscious alchemic state wherein misery turns to habit, and the soul takes on incredible endurance.

From right to left, hour after hour, the tribune, swaying in his easy-chair, turned with thought of everything rather than the wretchedness of the slaves upon the benches. Their motions, precise, and exactly the same on both sides of the vessel, after a while became monotonous; and then he amused himself singling out individuals. With his stylus he made note of objections, thinking, if all went well, he would find among the pirates of whom he was in search better men for the places.

There was no need of keeping the proper names of the slaves brought to the galleys as to their graves; so, for convenience, they were usually identified by the numerals painted upon the benches to which they were assigned. As the sharp eyes of the great man moved from seat to seat on either hand, they came at last to number sixty, which, as has been said, belonged properly to the last bank on the left-

hand side, but, wanting room aft, had been fixed above the first bench of the first bank. There they rested.

The bench of number sixty was slightly above the level of the platform, and but a few feet away. The light glinting through the grating over his head gave the rower fairly to the tribune's view — erect, and, like all his fellows, naked, except a cincture about the loins. There were, however, some points in his favor. He was very young, not more than twenty. Furthermore, Arrius was not merely given to dice; he was a connoisseur of men physically, and when ashore indulged a habit of visiting the gymnasia to see and admire the most famous athletæ. From some professor, doubtless, he had caught the idea that strength was as much of the quality as the quantity of the muscle, while superiority in performance required a certain mind as well as strength. Having adopted the doctrine, like most men with a hobby, he was always looking for illustrations to support it.

The reader may well believe that while the tribune, in the search for the perfect, was often called upon to stop and study, he was seldom perfectly satisfied—in fact, very seldom held as long as on this occasion.

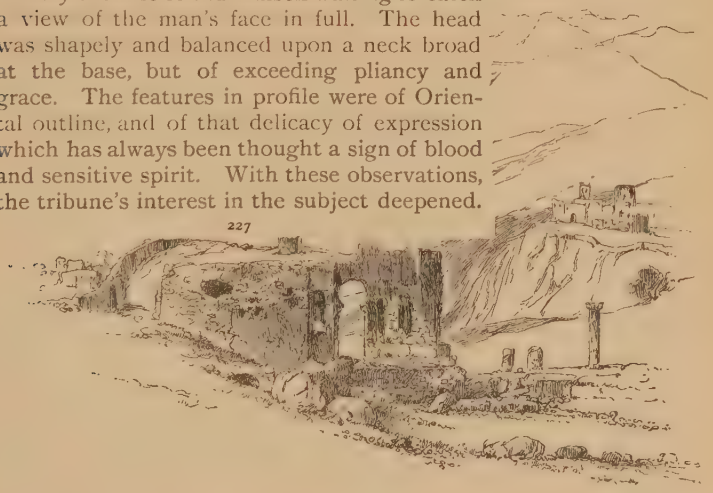
In the beginning of each movement of the oar, the rower's body and face were brought into profile view from the platform; the movement ended with the body reversed, and in a pushing posture. The grace and ease of the action at first suggested a doubt of the honesty

HOUSE OF SAINT VERONICA, JERUSALEM

of the effort put forth; but it was speedily dismissed; the firmness with which the oar was held while in the reach forward, its bending under the push, were proofs of the force applied; not that only, they as certainly proved the rower's art, and put the critic in the great arm-chair in search of the combination of strength and cleverness which was the central idea of his theory.

In course of the study, Arrius observed the subject's youth; wholly unconscious of tenderness on that account, he also observed that he seemed of good height, and that his limbs, upper and nether, were singularly perfect. The arms, perhaps, were too long, but the objection was well hidden under a mass of muscle, which, in some movements, swelled and knotted like kinking cords. Every rib in the round body was discernible; yet the leanness was the healthful reduction so strained after in the palæstræ. And altogether there was in the rower's action a certain harmony which, besides addressing itself to the tribune's theory, stimulated both his curiosity and general interest.

Very soon he found himself waiting to catch a view of the man's face in full. The head was shapely and balanced upon a neck broad at the base, but of exceeding pliancy and grace. The features in profile were of Oriental outline, and of that delicacy of expression which has always been thought a sign of blood and sensitive spirit. With these observations, the tribune's interest in the subject deepened.



"By the gods," he said to himself, "the fellow impresses me! He promises well. I will know more of him."

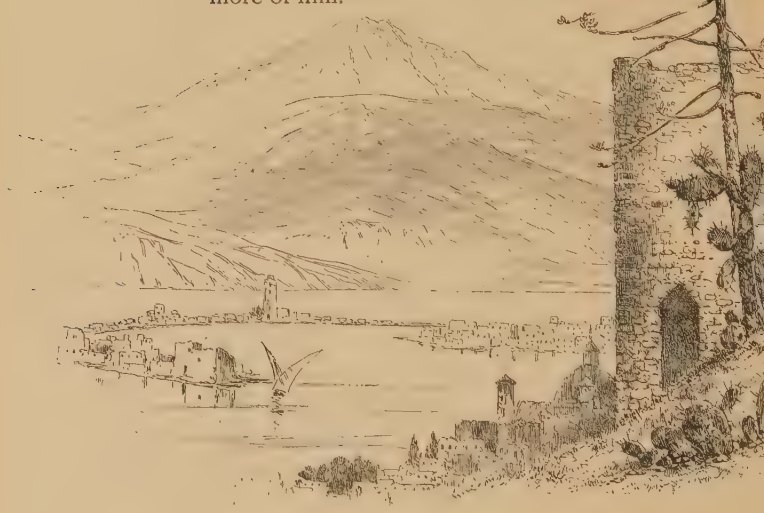
Directly the tribune caught the view he wished—the rower turned and looked at him.

"A Jew! and a boy!"

Under the gaze then fixed steadily upon him, the large eyes of the slave grew larger—the blood surged to his very brows—the blade lingered in his hands. But instantly, with an angry crash, down fell the gavel of the hortator. The rower started, withdrew his face from the inquisitor, and, as if personally chidden, dropped the oar half feathered. When he glanced again at the tribune, he was vastly more astonished—he was met with a kindly smile.

Meantime the galley entered the Strait of Messina, and, skimming past the city of that name, was after a while turned eastward, leaving the cloud over Ætna in the sky astern.

Often as Arrius returned to his platform in the cabin he returned to study the rower, and he kept saying to himself, "The fellow hath a spirit. A Jew is not a barbarian. I will know more of him."



CHAPTER III

ARRIUS AND BEN-HUR ON DECK

THE fourth day out, and the Astræa — so the galley was named—speeding through the Ionian Sea. The sky was clear, and the wind blew as if bearing the good-will of all the gods.

As it was possible to overtake the fleet before reaching the bay east of the island of Cythera, designated for assemblage, Arrius, somewhat impatient, spent much time on deck. He took note diligently of matters pertaining to his ship, and as a rule was well pleased. In the cabin, swinging in the great chair, his thought continually reverted to the rower on number sixty.

"Knowest thou the man just come from yon bench?" he at length asked of the hortator.

A relief was going on at the moment.

"From number sixty?" returned the chief.

"Yes."

The chief looked sharply at the rower then going forward.

"As thou knowest," he replied, "the ship is but a month from the maker's hand, and the men are as new to me as the ship."

"He is a Jew," Arrius remarked, thoughtfully.

"The noble Quintus is shrewd."

"He is very young," Arrius continued.

"But our best rower," said the other. "I have seen his oar bend almost to breaking."

"Of what disposition is he?"

"He is obedient; further I know not. Once he made request of me."

"For what?"

"He wished me to change him alternately from the right to the left."

"Did he give a reason?"

"He had observed that the men who are confined to one side become misshapen. He also said that some day of storm or battle there might be sudden need to change him, and he might then be unserviceable."

"Perpol! The idea is new. What else hast thou observed of him?"

"He is cleanly above his companions."

"In that he is Roman," said Arrius, approvingly. "Have you nothing of his history?"

"Not a word."

The tribune reflected a while, and turned to go to his own seat.

"If I should be on deck when his time is up," he paused to say, "send him to me. Let him come alone."

About two hours later Arrius stood under the aplustre of the galley; in the mood of one who, seeing himself carried swiftly towards an event of mighty import, has nothing to do but wait—the mood in which philosophy vests an even-minded man with the utmost calm, and is ever so serviceable. The pilot sat with a hand upon the rope by which the rudder paddles, one on each side of the vessel, were man-

aged. In the shade of the sail some sailors lay asleep, and up on the yard there was a lookout. Lifting his eyes from the solarium set under the aplustre for reference in keeping the course, Arrius beheld the rower approaching.

"The chief called thee the noble Arrius, and said it was thy will that I should seek thee here. I have come."

Arrius surveyed the figure, tall, sinewy, glistening in the sun, and tinted by the rich red blood within—surveyed it admiringly, and with a thought of the arena; yet the manner was not without effect upon him: there was in the voice a suggestion of life at least partly spent under refining influences; the eyes were clear and open, and more curious than defiant. To the shrewd, demanding, masterful glance bent upon it, the face gave back nothing to mar its youthful comeliness—nothing of accusation or sullenness or menace, only the signs which a great sorrow long borne imprints as time mellows the surface of pictures. In tacit acknowledgment of the effect, the Roman spoke as an older man to a younger, not as a master to a slave.

"The hortator tells me thou art his best rower."

"The hortator is very kind," the rower answered.

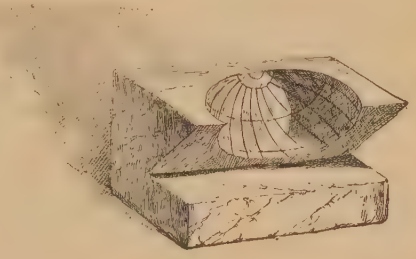
"Hast thou seen much service?"

"About three years."

"At the oars?"

"I cannot recall a day of rest from them."

"The labor is hard; few men bear it a year



without breaking, and thou — thou art but a boy."

"The noble Arrius forgets that the spirit hath much to do with endurance. By its help the weak sometimes thrive, when the strong perish."

"From thy speech, thou art a Jew."

"My ancestors further back than the first Roman were Hebrews."

"The stubborn pride of thy race is not lost in thee," said Arrius, observing a flush upon the rower's face.

"Pride is never so loud as when in chains."

"What cause hast thou for pride?"

"That I am a Jew."

Arrius smiled.

"I have not been to Jerusalem," he said; "but I have heard of its princes. I knew one of them. He was a merchant, and sailed the seas. He was fit to have been a king. Of what degree art thou?"

"I must answer thee from the bench of a galley. I am of the degree of slaves. My father was a prince of Jerusalem, and, as a merchant, he sailed the seas. He was known and honored in the guest-chamber of the great Augustus."

"His name?"

"Ithamar, of the house of Hur."

The tribune raised his hand in astonishment.

"A son of Hur—thou?"

After a silence, he asked,

"What brought thee here?"

Judah lowered his head, and his breast labored hard. When his feelings were sufficiently mastered, he looked the tribune in the face, and answered,

"I was accused of attempting to assassinate Valerius Gratus, the procurator."

"Thou!" cried Arrius, yet more amazed, and retreating a step. "Thou that assassin! All Rome rang with the story. It came to my ship in the river by Lodinum."

The two regarded each other silently.

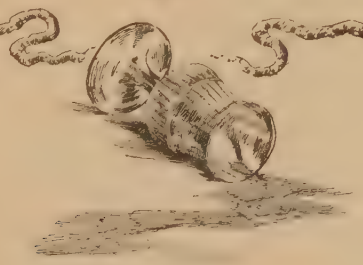
"I thought the family of Hur blotted from the earth," said Arrius, speaking first.

A flood of tender recollections carried the young man's pride away; tears shone upon his cheeks.

"Mother—mother! And my little Tirzah! Where are they? O tribune, noble tribune, if thou knowest anything of them"—he clasped his hands in appeal—"tell me all thou knowest. Tell me if they are living—if living, where are they? and in what condition? Oh, I pray thee, tell me!"

He drew nearer Arrius, so near that his hands touched the cloak where it dropped from the latter's folded arms.

"The horrible day is three years gone," he continued—"three years, O tribune, and every hour a whole lifetime of misery—a lifetime in a bottomless pit with death, and no relief but in labor—and in all that time not a word from any one, not a whisper. Oh, if, in being forgotten, we could only forget! If only I could hide from that scene—my sister torn



from me, my mother's last look! I have felt the plague's breath, and the shock of ships in battle; I have heard the tempest lashing the sea, and laughed, though others prayed: death would have been a riddance. Bend the oar—yes, in the strain of mighty effort trying to escape the haunting of what that day occurred. Think what little will help me. Tell me they are dead, if no more, for happy they cannot be while I am lost. I have heard them call me in the night; I have seen them on the water walking. Oh, never anything so true as my mother's love! And Tirzah—her breath was as the breath of white lilies. She was the youngest branch of the palm—so fresh, so tender, so graceful, so beautiful! She made my day all morning. She came and went in music. And mine was the hand that laid them low! I—"

"Dost thou admit thy guilt?" asked Arrius, sternly.

The change that came upon Ben-Hur was wonderful to see, it was so instant and extreme. The voice sharpened; the hands arose tight-clinched; every fibre thrilled; his eyes inflamed.

"Thou hast heard of the God of my fathers," he said; "of the infinite Jehovah. By his truth and almightiness, and by the love with which he hath followed Israel from the beginning, I swear I am innocent!"

The tribune was much moved.

"O noble Roman!" continued Ben-Hur, "give me a little faith, and into my darkness, deeper darkening every day, send a light!"

Arrius turned away, and walked the deck.

"Didst thou not have a trial?" he asked, stopping suddenly.

"No!"

The Roman raised his head, surprised.

"No trial—no witnesses! Who passed judgment upon thee?"

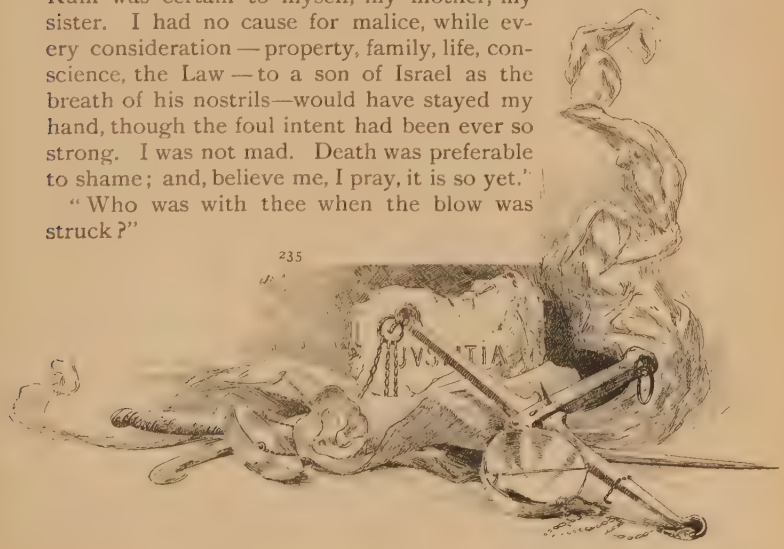
Romans, it should be remembered, were at no time such lovers of the law and its forms as in the ages of their decay.

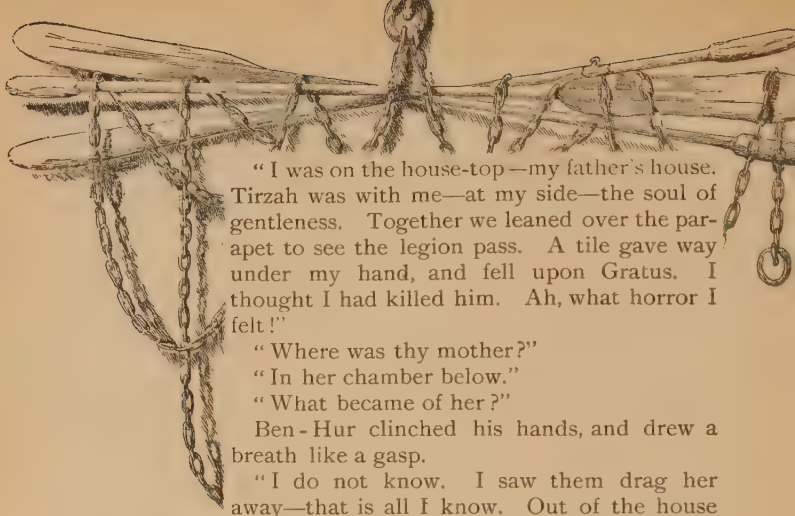
"They bound me with cords, and dragged me to a vault in the Tower. I saw no one. No one spoke to me. Next day soldiers took me to the sea-side. I have been a galley-slave ever since."

"What couldst thou have proven?"

"I was a boy, too young to be a conspirator. Gratus was a stranger to me. If I had meant to kill him, that was not the time or the place. He was riding in the midst of a legion, and it was broad day. I could not have escaped. I was of a class most friendly to Rome. My father had been distinguished for his services to the emperor. We had a great estate to lose. Ruin was certain to myself, my mother, my sister. I had no cause for malice, while every consideration — property, family, life, conscience, the Law — to a son of Israel as the breath of his nostrils—would have stayed my hand, though the foul intent had been ever so strong. I was not mad. Death was preferable to shame; and, believe me, I pray, it is so yet."

"Who was with thee when the blow was struck?"





"I was on the house-top—my father's house. Tirzah was with me—at my side—the soul of gentleness. Together we leaned over the parapet to see the legion pass. A tile gave way under my hand, and fell upon Gratus. I thought I had killed him. Ah, what horror I felt!"

"Where was thy mother?"

"In her chamber below."

"What became of her?"

Ben-Hur clinched his hands, and drew a breath like a gasp.

"I do not know. I saw them drag her away—that is all I know. Out of the house they drove every living thing, even the dumb cattle, and they sealed the gates. The purpose was that she should not return. I, too, ask for her. Oh for one word! She, at least, was innocent. I can forgive—but I pray thy pardon, noble tribune! A slave like me should not talk of forgiveness or of revenge. I am bound to an oar for life."

Arrius listened intently. He brought all his experience with slaves to his aid. If the feeling shown in this instance were assumed, the acting was perfect; on the other hand, if it were real, the Jew's innocence might not be doubted; and if he were innocent, with what blind fury the power had been exercised! A whole family blotted out to atone an accident! The thought shocked him.

There is no wiser providence than that our occupations, however rude or bloody, cannot wear us out morally; that such qualities as

justice and mercy, if they really possess us, continue to live on under them, like flowers under the snow. The tribune could be inexorable, else he had not been fit for the usages of his calling; he could also be just; and to excite his sense of wrong was to put him in the way to right the wrong. The crews of the ships in which he served came after a time to speak of him as the good tribune. Shrewd readers will not want a better definition of his character.

In this instance there were many circumstances certainly in the young man's favor, and some to be supposed. Possibly Arrius knew Valerius Gratus without loving him. Possibly he had known the elder Hur. In the course of his appeal, Judah had asked him of that; and, as will be noticed, he had made no reply.

For once the tribune was at loss, and hesitated. His power was ample. He was monarch of the ship. His prepossessions all moved him to mercy. His faith was won. Yet, he said to himself, there was no haste—or, rather, there was haste to Cythera; the best rower could not then be spared; he would wait; he would learn more; he would at least be sure this was the prince Ben-Hur, and that he was of a right disposition. Ordinarily, slaves were liars.

"It is enough," he said aloud. "Go back to thy place."

Ben-Hur bowed; looked once more into the master's face, but saw nothing for hope. He turned away slowly, looked back, and said,

"If thou dost think of me again, O tribune, let it not be lost in thy mind that I prayed thee only for word of my people — mother, sister."

He moved on.

Arrius followed him with admiring eyes.

"Perpol!" he thought. "With teaching, what a man for the arena! What a runner! Ye gods! what an arm for the sword or the cestus!—Stay!" he said, aloud.

Ben-Hur stopped, and the tribune went to him.

"If thou wert free, what wouldst thou do?"

"The noble Arrius mocks me!" Judah said, with trembling lips.

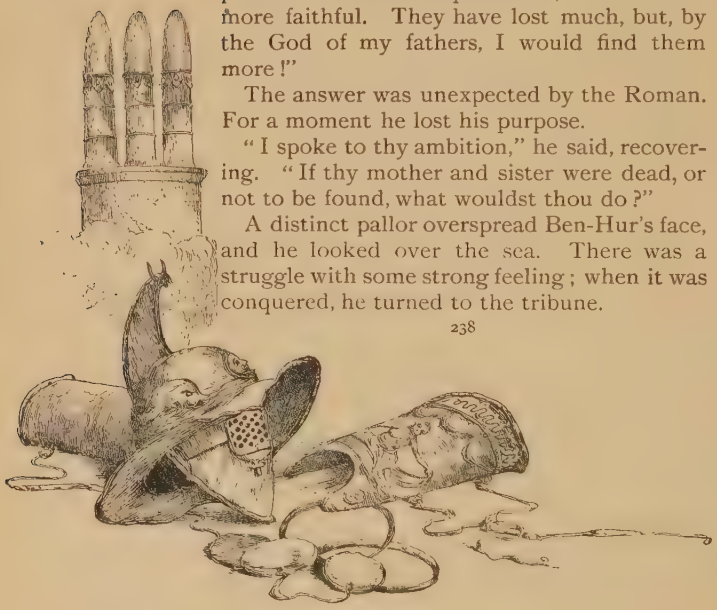
"No; by the gods, no!"

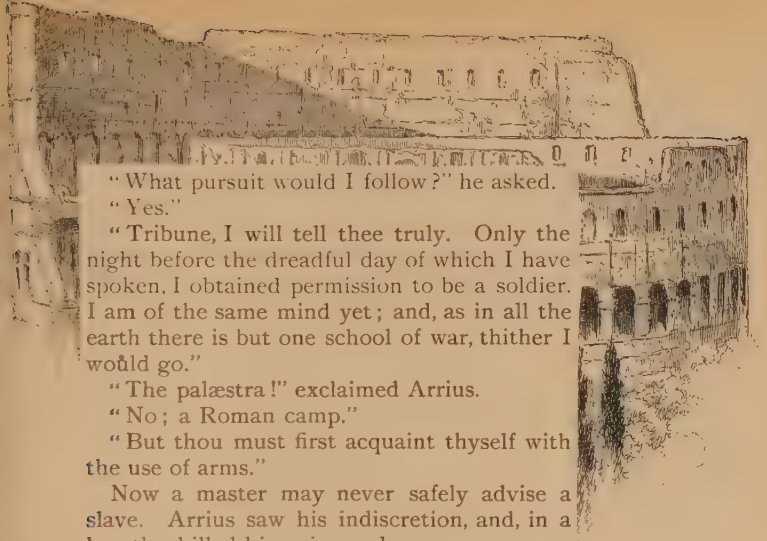
"Then I will answer gladly. I would give myself to duty the first of life. I would know no other. I would know no rest until my mother and Tirzah were restored to home. I would give every day and hour to their happiness. I would wait upon them; never a slave more faithful. They have lost much, but, by the God of my fathers, I would find them more!"

The answer was unexpected by the Roman. For a moment he lost his purpose.

"I spoke to thy ambition," he said, recovering. "If thy mother and sister were dead, or not to be found, what wouldst thou do?"

A distinct pallor overspread Ben-Hur's face, and he looked over the sea. There was a struggle with some strong feeling; when it was conquered, he turned to the tribune.





"What pursuit would I follow?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Tribune, I will tell thee truly. Only the night before the dreadful day of which I have spoken, I obtained permission to be a soldier. I am of the same mind yet; and, as in all the earth there is but one school of war, thither I would go."

"The palæstra!" exclaimed Arrius.

"No; a Roman camp."

"But thou must first acquaint thyself with the use of arms."

Now a master may never safely advise a slave. Arrius saw his indiscretion, and, in a breath, chilled his voice and manner.

"Go now," he said, "and do not build upon what has passed between us. Perhaps I do but play with thee. Or"—he looked away musingly—"or, if thou dost think of it with any hope, choose between the renown of a gladiator and the service of a soldier. The former may come of the favor of the emperor; there is no reward for thee in the latter. Thou art not a Roman. Go!"

A short while after Ben-Hur was upon his bench again.

A man's task is always light if his heart is light. Handling the oar did not seem so toilsome to Judah. A hope had come to him, like a singing bird. He could hardly see the visitor or hear its song; that it was there, though, he knew; his feelings told him so. The caution of the tribune—"Perhaps I do but play with thee"—was dismissed often as it recurred

to his mind. That he had been called by the great man and asked his story was the bread upon which he fed his hungry spirit. Surely something good would come of it. The light about his bench was clear and bright with promises, and he prayed.

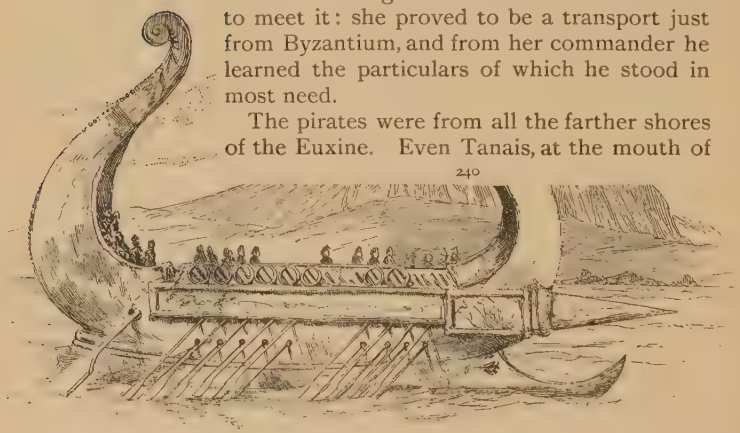
"O God! I am a true son of the Israel thou hast so loved! Help me, I pray thee!"

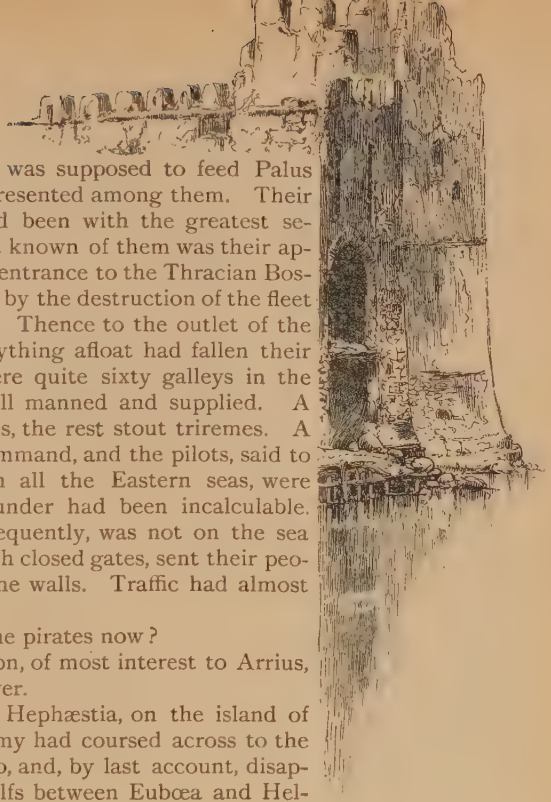
CHAPTER IV
"NO. 60"

UPON the bay of Antemona, east of Cythera the island, the hundred galleys assembled. There the tribune gave one day to inspection. He sailed then to Naxos, the largest of the Cyclades, midway the coasts of Greece and Asia, like a great stone planted in the centre of a highway, from which he could challenge everything that passed; at the same time, he would be in position to go after the pirates instantly, whether they were in the Ægean or out on the Mediterranean.

As the fleet, in order, rowed in towards the mountain-shores of the island, a galley was descried coming from the north. Arrius went to meet it: she proved to be a transport just from Byzantium, and from her commander he learned the particulars of which he stood in most need.

The pirates were from all the farther shores of the Euxine. Even Tanais, at the mouth of





the river which was supposed to feed Palus Mæotis, was represented among them. Their preparations had been with the greatest secrecy. The first known of them was their appearance off the entrance to the Thracian Bosphorus, followed by the destruction of the fleet in station there. Thence to the outlet of the Hellespont everything afloat had fallen their prey. There were quite sixty galleys in the squadron, all well manned and supplied. A few were biremes, the rest stout triremes. A Greek was in command, and the pilots, said to be familiar with all the Eastern seas, were Greek. The plunder had been incalculable. The panic, consequently, was not on the sea alone; cities, with closed gates, sent their people nightly to the walls. Traffic had almost ceased.

Where were the pirates now?

To this question, of most interest to Arrius, he received answer.

After sacking Hephæstia, on the island of Lemnos, the enemy had coursed across to the Thessalian group, and, by last account, disappeared in the gulfs between Eubœa and Hellas.

Such were the tidings.

Then the people of the island, drawn to the hill-tops by the rare spectacle of a hundred ships careering in united squadron, beheld the advance division suddenly turn to the north, and the others follow, wheeling upon the same point like cavalry in a column. News of the piratical descent had reached them, and now,

watching the white sails until they faded from sight up between Rhene and Syros, the thoughtful among them took comfort, and were grateful. What Rome seized with strong hand she always defended: in return for their taxes, she gave them safety.

The tribune was more than pleased with the enemy's movements; he was doubly thankful to Fortune. She had brought swift and sure intelligence, and had lured his foes into the waters where, of all others, destruction was most assured. He knew the havoc one galley could play in a broad sea like the Mediterranean, and the difficulty of finding and overhauling her; he knew, also, how those very circumstances would enhance the service and glory if, at one blow, he could put a finish to the whole piratical array.

If the reader will take a map of Greece and the Ægean, he will notice the island of Eubœa lying along the classic coast like a rampart against Asia, leaving a channel between it and the continent quite a hundred and twenty miles in length, and scarcely an average of eight in width. The inlet on the north had admitted the fleet of Xerxes, and now it received the bold raiders from the Euxine. The towns along the Pelasgic and Meliac gulfs were rich and their plunder seductive. All things considered, therefore, Arrius judged that the robbers might be found somewhere below Thermopylæ. Welcoming the chance, he resolved to enclose them north and south, to do which not an hour could be lost; even the fruits and

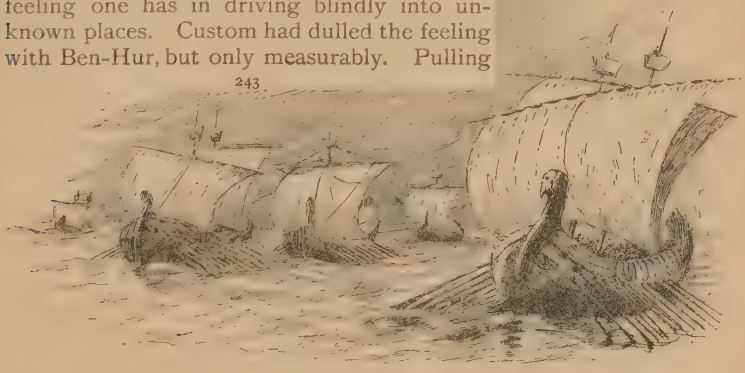
wines and women of Naxos must be left behind. So he sailed away without stop or tack until, a little before nightfall, Mount Ocha was seen upreared against the sky, and the pilot reported the Eubœan coast.

At a signal the fleet rested upon its oars. When the movement was resumed, Arrius led a division of fifty of the galleys, intending to take them up the channel, while another division, equally strong, turned their prows to the outer or seaward side of the island, with orders to make all haste to the upper inlet, and descend sweeping the waters.

To be sure, neither division was equal in number to the pirates; but each had advantages in compensation, among them, by no means least, a discipline impossible to a lawless horde, however brave. Besides, it was a shrewd count on the tribune's side, if, peradventure, one should be defeated, the other would find the enemy shattered by his victory, and in condition to be easily overwhelmed.

Meantime Ben-Hur kept his bench, relieved every six hours. The rest in the Bay of Antemona had freshened him, so that the oar was not troublesome, and the chief on the platform found no fault.

People, generally, are not aware of the ease of mind there is in knowing where they are, and where they are going. The sensation of being lost is a keen distress; still worse is the feeling one has in driving blindly into unknown places. Custom had dulled the feeling with Ben-Hur, but only measurably. Pulling



away hour after hour, sometimes days and nights together, sensible all the time that the galley was gliding swiftly along some of the many tracks of the broad sea, the longing to know where he was, and whither going, was always present with him; but now it seemed quickened by the hope which had come to new life in his breast since the interview with the tribune. The narrower the abiding-place happens to be, the more intense is the longing; and so he found. He seemed to hear every sound of the ship in labor, and listened to each one as if it were a voice come to tell him something; he looked to the grating overhead. and through it into the light of which so small a portion was his, expecting, he knew not what; and many times he caught himself on the point of yielding to the impulse to speak to the chief on the platform, than which no circumstance of battle would have astonished that dignitary more.

In his long service, by watching the shifting of the meagre sunbeams upon the cabin floor when the ship was under way, he had come to know, generally, the quarter into which she was sailing. This, of course, was only of clear days like those good-fortune was sending the tribune. The experience had not failed him in the period succeeding the departure from Cythera. Thinking they were tending towards the old Judean country, he was sensitive to every variation from the course. With a pang, he had observed the sudden change northward which, as has been noticed, took

place near Naxos: the cause, however, he could not even conjecture; for it must be remembered that, in common with his fellow-slaves, he knew nothing of the situation, and had no interest in the voyage. His place was at the oar, and he was held there inexorably, whether at anchor or under sail. Once only in three years had he been permitted an outlook from the deck. The occasion we have seen. He had no idea that, following the vessel he was helping drive, there was a great squadron close at hand and in beautiful order; no more did he know the object of which it was in pursuit.

When the sun, going down, withdrew his last ray from the cabin, the galley still held northward. Night fell, yet Ben-Hur could discern no change. About that time the smell of incense floated down the gangways from the deck.

"The tribune is at the altar," he thought. "Can it be we are going into battle?"

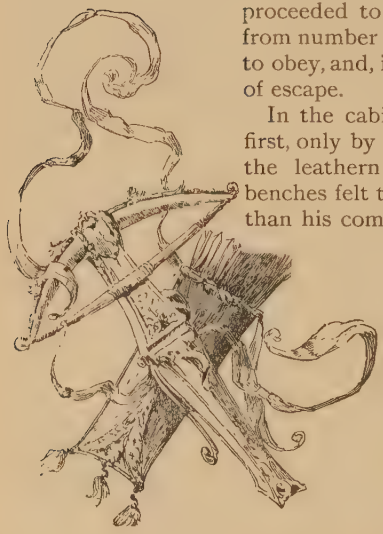
He became observant.

Now he had been in many battles without having seen one. From his bench he had heard them above and about him, until he was familiar with all their notes, almost as a singer with a song. So, too, he had become acquainted with many of the preliminaries of an engagement, of which, with a Roman as well as a Greek, the most invariable was the sacrifice to the gods. The rites were the same as those performed at the beginning of a voyage, and to him, when noticed, they were always an admonition.

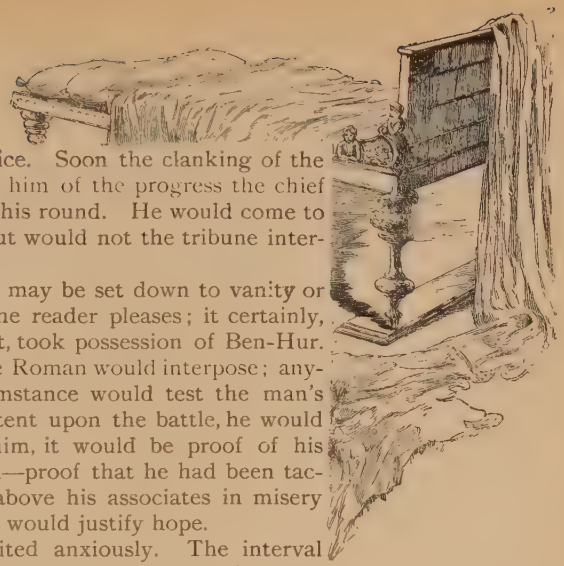
A battle, it should be observed, possessed for him and his fellow-slaves of the oar an interest unlike that of the sailor and marine; it came, not of the danger encountered, but of the fact that defeat, if survived, might bring an alteration of condition—possibly freedom—at least a change of masters, which might be for the better.

In good time the lanterns were lighted and hung by the stairs, and the tribune came down from the deck. At his word the marines put on their armor. At his word again, the machines were looked to, and spears, javelins, and arrows, in great sheaves, brought and laid upon the floor, together with jars of inflammable oil, and baskets of cotton balls wound loose like the wicking of candles. And when, finally, Ben-Hur saw the tribune mount his platform and don his armor, and get his helmet and shield out, the meaning of the preparations might not be any longer doubted, and he made ready for the last ignominy of his service.

To every bench, as a fixture, there was a chain with heavy anklets. These the hortator proceeded to lock upon the oarsmen, going from number to number, leaving no choice but to obey, and, in event of disaster, no possibility of escape.



In the cabin, then, a silence fell, broken, at first, only by the sough of the oars turning in the leathern cases. Every man upon the benches felt the shame, Ben-Hur more keenly than his companions. He would have put it



away at any price. Soon the clanking of the fetters notified him of the progress the chief was making in his round. He would come to him in turn; but would not the tribune interpose for him?

The thought may be set down to vanity or selfishness, as the reader pleases; it certainly, at that moment, took possession of Ben-Hur. He believed the Roman would interpose; anyhow, the circumstance would test the man's feelings. If, intent upon the battle, he would but think of him, it would be proof of his opinion formed—proof that he had been tacitly promoted above his associates in misery—such proof as would justify hope.

Ben-Hur waited anxiously. The interval seemed like an age. At every turn of the oar he looked towards the tribune, who, his simple preparations made, lay down upon the couch and composed himself to rest; whereupon number sixty chid himself, and laughed grimly, and resolved not to look that way again.

The hortator approached. Now he was at number one—the rattle of the iron links sounded horribly. At last number sixty! Calm from despair, Ben-Hur held his oar at poise, and gave his foot to the officer. Then the tribune stirred—sat up—beckoned to the chief.

A strong revulsion seized the Jew. From the hortator, the great man glanced at him; and when he dropped his oar all the section of the ship on his side seemed aglow. He heard nothing of what was said; enough that the chain hung idly from its staple in the

CHAPTER V

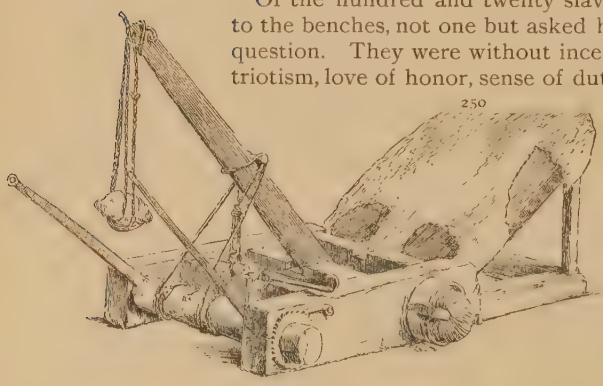
THE SEA-FIGHT

EVERY soul aboard, even the ship, awoke. Officers went to their quarters. The marines took arms, and were led out, looking in all respects like legionaries. Sheaves of arrows and armfuls of javelins were carried on deck. By the central stairs the oil-tanks and fire-balls were set ready for use. Additional lanterns were lighted. Buckets were filled with water. The rowers in relief assembled under guard in front of the chief. As Providence would have it, Ben-Hur was one of the latter. Overhead he heard the muffled noise of the final preparations — of the sailors furling sail, spreading the nettings, unslinging the machines, and hanging the armor of bull-hide over the side. Presently quiet settled about the galley again; quiet full of vague dread and expectation, which, interpreted, means ready.

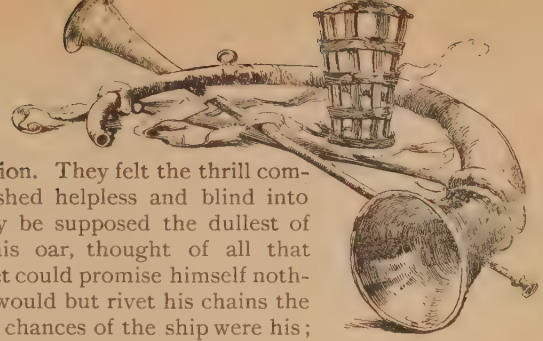
At a signal passed down from the deck, and communicated to the hortator by a petty officer stationed on the stairs, all at once the oars stopped.

What did it mean?

Of the hundred and twenty slaves chained to the benches, not one but asked himself the question. They were without incentive. Patriotism, love of honor, sense of duty, brought



250



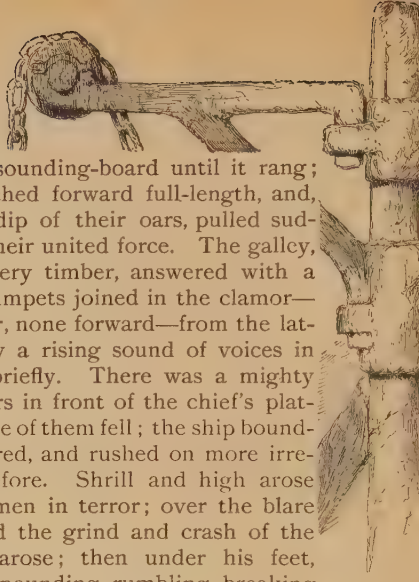
them no inspiration. They felt the thrill common to men rushed helpless and blind into danger. It may be supposed the dullest of them, poising his oar, thought of all that might happen, yet could promise himself nothing; for victory would but rivet his chains the firmer, while the chances of the ship were his; sinking or on fire, he was doomed to her fate.

Of the situation without they might not ask. And who were the enemy? And what if they were friends, brethren, countrymen? The reader, carrying the suggestion forward, will see the necessity which governed the Roman when, in such emergencies, he locked the hapless wretches to their seats.

There was little time, however, for such thought with them. A sound like the rowing of galleys astern attracted Ben-Hur, and the Astræa rocked as if in the midst of countering waves. The idea of a fleet at hand broke upon him — a fleet in manœuvre — forming probably for attack. His blood started with the fancy.

Another signal order came down from deck. The oars dipped, and the galley started imperceptibly. No sound from without, none from within, yet each man in the cabin instinctively poised himself for a shock; the very ship seemed to catch the sense, and hold its breath, and go crouched, tiger-like.

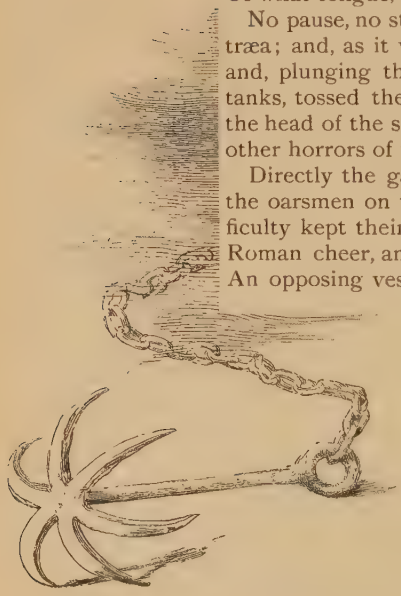
In such a situation time is inappreciable; so that Ben-Hur could form no judgment of distance gone. At last there was a sound of trumpets on deck, full, clear, long-blown. The



chief beat the sounding-board until it rang; the rowers reached forward full-length, and, deepening the dip of their oars, pulled suddenly with all their united force. The galley, quivering in every timber, answered with a leap. Other trumpets joined in the clamor—all from the rear, none forward—from the latter quarter only a rising sound of voices in tumult heard briefly. There was a mighty blow; the rowers in front of the chief's platform reeled, some of them fell; the ship bounded back, recovered, and rushed on more irresistibly than before. Shrill and high arose the shrieks of men in terror; over the blare of trumpets, and the grind and crash of the collision, they arose; then under his feet, under the keel, pounding, rumbling, breaking to pieces, drowning, Ben-Hur felt something overridden. The men about him looked at each other afraid. A shout of triumph from the deck—the beak of the Roman had won! But who were they whom the sea had drunk? Of what tongue, from what land were they?

No pause, no stay! Forward rushed the Astræa; and, as it went, some sailors ran down, and, plunging the cotton-balls into the oil-tanks, tossed them dripping to comrades at the head of the stairs: fire was to be added to other horrors of the combat.

Directly the galley heeled over so far that the oarsmen on the uppermost side with difficulty kept their benches. Again the hearty Roman cheer, and with it despairing shrieks. An opposing vessel, caught by the grappling-



hooks of the great crane swinging from the prow, was being lifted into the air that it might be dropped and sunk.

The shouting increased on the right hand and on the left; before, behind, swelled an indescribable clamor. Occasionally there was a crash, followed by sudden peals of fright, telling of other ships ridden down, and their crews drowned in the vortexes.

Nor was the fight all on one side. Now and then a Roman in armor was borne down the hatchway, and laid bleeding, sometimes dying, on the floor.

Sometimes, also, puffs of smoke, blended with steam, and foul with the scent of roasting human flesh, poured into the cabin, turning the dimming light into yellow murk. Gasping for breath the while, Ben-Hur knew they were passing through the cloud of a ship on fire, and burning up with the rowers chained to the benches.

The Astræa all this time was in motion Suddenly she stopped. The oars forward were dashed from the hands of the rowers, and the rowers from their benches. On deck, then, a furious trampling, and on the sides a grinding of ships afoul of each other. For the first time the beating of the gavel was lost in the uproar. Men sank on the floor in fear or looked about seeking a hiding-place. In the midst of the panic a body plunged or was pitched headlong down the hatchway, falling near Ben-Hur. He beheld the half-naked carcass, a mass of hair blackening the face, and under it

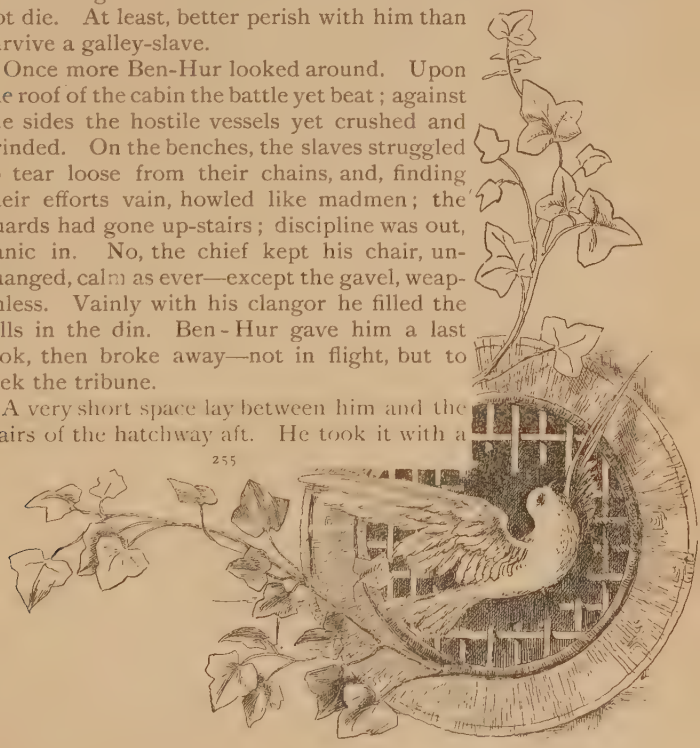
a shield of bull-hide and wicker-work—a barbarian from the white-skinned nations of the North whom death had robbed of plunder and revenge. How came he there? An iron hand had snatched him from the opposing deck?—no, the Astræa had been boarded! The Romans were fighting on their own deck? A chill smote the young Jew: Arrius was hard pressed—he might be defending his own life. If he should be slain! God of Abraham forefend! The hopes and dreams so lately come, were they only hopes and dreams? Mother and sister—house—home—Holy Land—was he not to see them, after all? The tumult thundered above him; he looked around; in the cabin all was confusion—the rowers on the benches paralyzed; men running blindly hither and thither; only the chief on his seat imperturbable, vainly beating the sounding-board, and waiting the order of the tribune—in the red murk illustrating the matchless discipline which had won the world.

The example had a good effect upon Ben-Hur. He controlled himself enough to think. Honor and duty bound the Roman to the platform; but what had he to do with such motives then? The bench was a thing to run from; while, if he were to die a slave, who would be the better of the sacrifice? With him living was duty, if not honor. His life belonged to his people. They arose before him never more real: he saw them, their arms out-stretched; he heard them imploring him. And he would go to them. He started—stopped. Alas! a

Roman judgment held him in doom. While it endured, escape would be profitless. In the wide, wide earth there was no place in which he would be safe from the imperial demand; upon the land none, nor upon the sea. Whereas he required freedom according to the forms of law, so only could he abide in Judea and execute the filial purpose to which he would devote himself: in other land he would not live. Dear God! How he had waited and watched and prayed for such a release! And how it had been delayed! But at last he had seen it in the promise of the tribune. What else the great man's meaning? And if the benefactor so belated should now be slain! The dead come not back to redeem the pledges of the living. It should not be—Arrius should not die. At least, better perish with him than survive a galley-slave.

Once more Ben-Hur looked around. Upon the roof of the cabin the battle yet beat; against the sides the hostile vessels yet crushed and grinded. On the benches, the slaves struggled to tear loose from their chains, and, finding their efforts vain, howled like madmen; the guards had gone up-stairs; discipline was out, panic in. No, the chief kept his chair, unchanged, calm as ever—except the gavel, weaponless. Vainly with his clangor he filled the lulls in the din. Ben-Hur gave him a last look, then broke away—not in flight, but to seek the tribune.

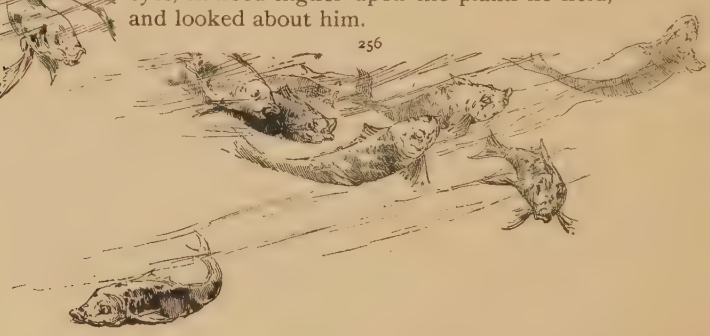
A very short space lay between him and the stairs of the hatchway aft. He took it with a



leap, and was half-way up the steps—up far enough to catch a glimpse of the sky blood-red with fire, of the ships alongside, of the sea covered with ships and wrecks, of the fight closed in about the pilot's quarter, the assailants many, the defenders few—when suddenly his foothold was knocked away, and he pitched backward. The floor, when he reached it, seemed to be lifting itself and breaking to pieces; then, in a twinkling, the whole after-part of the hull broke asunder, and, as if it had all the time been lying in wait, the sea, hissing and foaming, leaped in, and all became darkness and surging water to Ben-Hur.

It cannot be said that the young Jew helped himself in this stress. Besides his usual strength, he had the indefinite extra force which nature keeps in reserve for just such perils to life; yet the darkness, and the whirl and roar of water, stupefied him. Even the holding his breath was involuntary.

The influx of the flood tossed him like a log forward into the cabin, where he would have drowned but for the refluence of the sinking motion. As it was, fathoms under the surface the hollow mass vomited him forth, and he arose along with the loosed débris. In the act of rising, he clutched something, and held to it. The time he was under seemed an age longer than it really was; at last he gained the top; with a great gasp he filled his lungs afresh, and, tossing the water from his hair and eyes, climbed higher upon the plank he held, and looked about him.



Death had pursued him closely under the waves; he found it waiting for him when he was risen—waiting multiform.

Smoke lay upon the sea like a semitransparent fog, through which here and there shone cores of intense brilliance. A quick intelligence told him that they were ships on fire. The battle was yet on; nor could he say who was victor. Within the radius of his vision now and then ships passed, shooting shadows athwart lights. Out of the dun clouds farther on he caught the crash of other ships colliding. The danger, however, was closer at hand. When the Astræa went down, her deck, it will be recollected, held her own crew, and the crews of the two galleys which had attacked her at the same time, all of whom were ingulfed. Many of them came to the surface together, and on the same plank or support of whatever kind continued the combat, begun possibly in the vortex fathoms down. Writhing and twisting in deadly embrace, sometimes striking with sword or javelin, they kept the sea around them in agitation, at one place inky-black, at another aflame with fiery reflections. With their struggles he had nothing to do; they were all his enemies: not one of them but would kill him for the plank on which he floated. He made haste to get away.

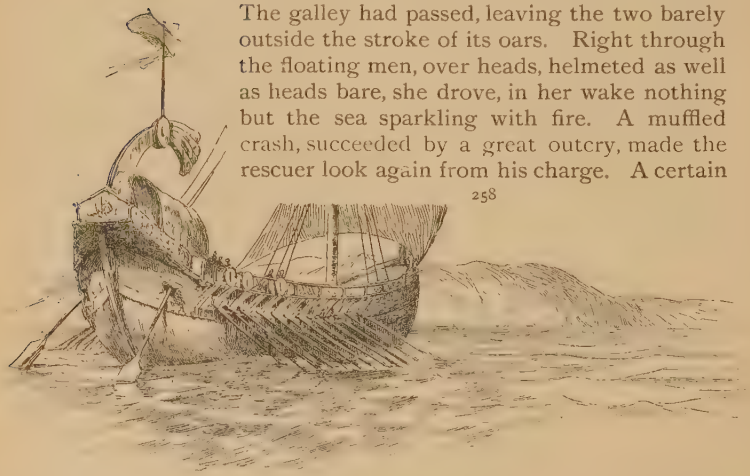
About that time he heard oars in quickest movement, and beheld a galley coming down upon him. The tall prow seemed doubly tall, and the red light playing upon its gilt and carving gave it an appearance of snaky life.

Under its foot the water churned to flying foam.

He struck out, pushing the plank, which was very broad and unmanageable. Seconds were precious — half a second might save or lose him. In the crisis of the effort, up from the sea, within arm's reach, a helmet shot like a gleam of gold. Next came two hands with fingers extended—large hands were they, and strong — their hold once fixed, might not be loosed. Ben-Hur swerved from them appalled. Up rose the helmet and the head it encased — then two arms, which began to beat the water wildly—the head turned back, and gave the face to the light. The mouth gaping wide; the eyes open, but sightless, and the bloodless pallor of a drowning man — never anything more ghastly! Yet he gave a cry of joy at the sight, and as the face was going under again, he caught the sufferer by the chain which passed from the helmet beneath the chin, and drew him to the plank.

The man was Arrius, the tribune.

For a while the water foamed and eddied violently about Ben-Hur, taxing all his strength to hold to the support and at the same time keep the Roman's head above the surface. The galley had passed, leaving the two barely outside the stroke of its oars. Right through the floating men, over heads, helmeted as well as heads bare, she drove, in her wake nothing but the sea sparkling with fire. A muffled crash, succeeded by a great outcry, made the rescuer look again from his charge. A certain

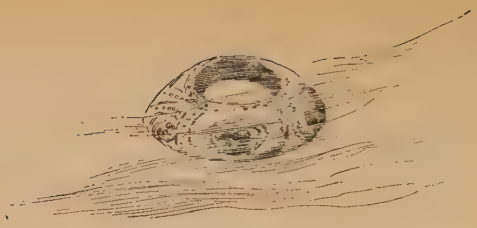


savage pleasure touched his heart—the Astræa was avenged.

After that the battle moved on. Resistance turned to flight. But who were the victors? Ben-Hur was sensible how much his freedom and the life of the tribune depended upon that event. He pushed the plank under the latter until it floated him, after which all his care was to keep him there. The dawn came slowly. He watched its growing hopefully, yet sometimes afraid. Would it bring the Romans or the pirates? If the pirates, his charge was lost.

At last morning broke in full, the air without a breath. Off to the left he saw the land, too far to think of attempting to make it. Here and there men were adrift like himself. In spots the sea was blackened by charred and sometimes smoking fragments. A galley up a long way was lying to with a torn sail hanging from the tilted yard, and the oars all idle. Still farther away he could discern moving specks, which he thought might be ships in flight or pursuit, or they might be white birds a-wing.

An hour passed thus. His anxiety increased. If relief came not speedily, Arrius would die. Sometimes he seemed already dead, he lay so still. He took the helmet off, and then, with greater difficulty, the cuirass; the heart he found fluttering. He took hope at the sign, and held on. There was nothing to do but wait, and, after the manner of his people, pray.



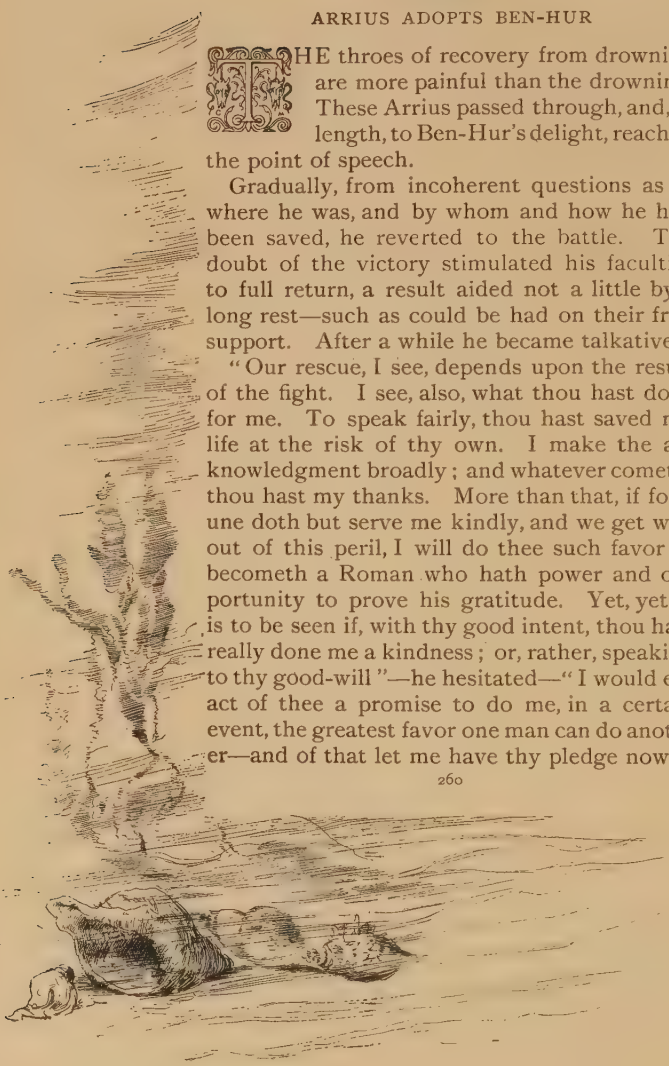
CHAPTER VI

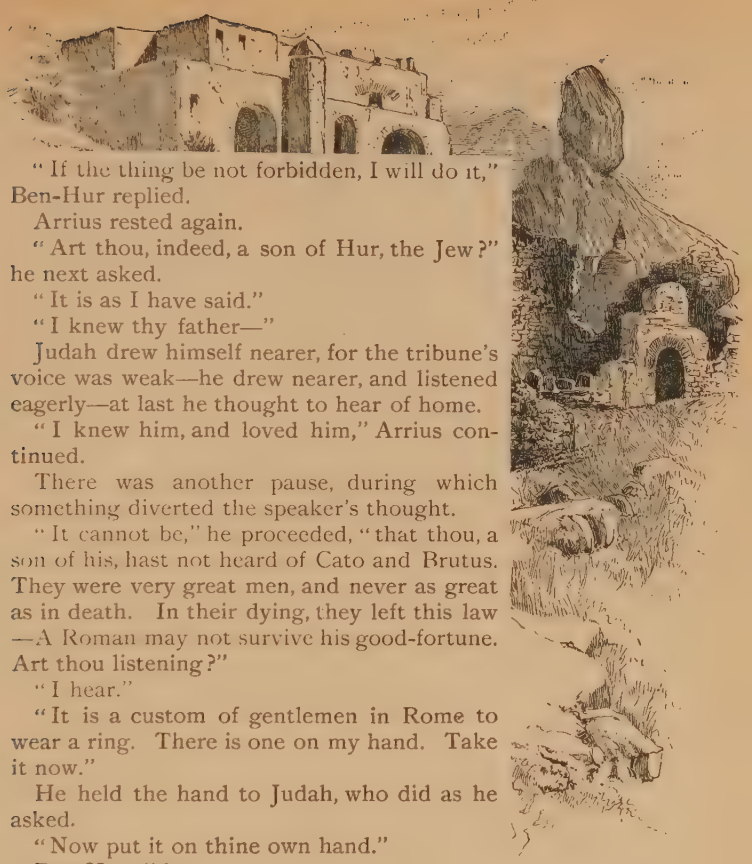
ARRIUS ADOPTS BEN-HUR

THE throes of recovery from drowning are more painful than the drowning. These Arrius passed through, and, at length, to Ben-Hur's delight, reached the point of speech.

Gradually, from incoherent questions as to where he was, and by whom and how he had been saved, he reverted to the battle. The doubt of the victory stimulated his faculties to full return, a result aided not a little by a long rest—such as could be had on their frail support. After a while he became talkative.

"Our rescue, I see, depends upon the result of the fight. I see, also, what thou hast done for me. To speak fairly, thou hast saved my life at the risk of thy own. I make the acknowledgment broadly; and whatever cometh, thou hast my thanks. More than that, if fortune doth but serve me kindly, and we get well out of this peril, I will do thee such favor as becometh a Roman who hath power and opportunity to prove his gratitude. Yet, yet it is to be seen if, with thy good intent, thou hast really done me a kindness; or, rather, speaking to thy good-will"—he hesitated—"I would exact of thee a promise to do me, in a certain event, the greatest favor one man can do another—and of that let me have thy pledge now."





"If the thing be not forbidden, I will do it," Ben-Hur replied.

Arrius rested again.

"Art thou, indeed, a son of Hur, the Jew?" he next asked.

"It is as I have said."

"I knew thy father—"

Judah drew himself nearer, for the tribune's voice was weak—he drew nearer, and listened eagerly—at last he thought to hear of home.

"I knew him, and loved him," Arrius continued.

There was another pause, during which something diverted the speaker's thought.

"It cannot be," he proceeded, "that thou, a son of his, hast not heard of Cato and Brutus. They were very great men, and never as great as in death. In their dying, they left this law —A Roman may not survive his good-fortune. Art thou listening?"

"I hear."

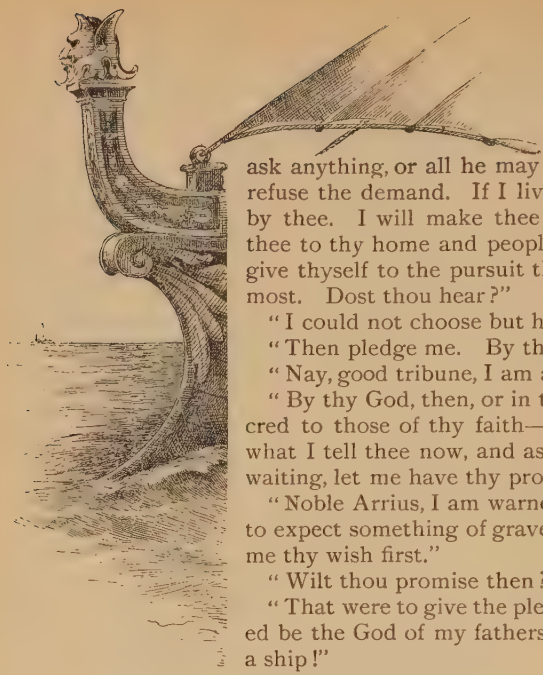
"It is a custom of gentlemen in Rome to wear a ring. There is one on my hand. Take it now."

He held the hand to Judah, who did as he asked.

"Now put it on thine own hand."

Ben-Hur did so.

"The trinket hath its uses," said Arrius next. "I have property and money. I am accounted rich even in Rome. I have no family. Show the ring to my freedman, who hath control in my absence; you will find him in a villa near Misenum. Tell him how it came to thee, and



ask anything, or all he may have; he will not refuse the demand. If I live, I will do better by thee. I will make thee free, and restore thee to thy home and people; or thou mayst give thyself to the pursuit that pleaseth thee most. Dost thou hear?"

"I could not choose but hear."

"Then pledge me. By the gods—"

"Nay, good tribune, I am a Jew."

"By thy God, then, or in the form most sacred to those of thy faith—pledge me to do what I tell thee now, and as I tell thee; I am waiting, let me have thy promise."

"Noble Arrius, I am warned by thy manner to expect something of gravest concern. Tell me thy wish first."

"Wilt thou promise then?"

"That were to give the pledge, and— Blessed be the God of my fathers! yonder cometh a ship!"

"In what direction?"

"From the north."

"Canst thou tell her nationality by outward signs?"

"No. My service hath been at the oars."

"Hath she a flag?"

"I cannot see one."

Arrius remained quiet some time, apparently in deep reflection.

"Does the ship hold this way yet?" he at length asked.

"Still this way."

"Look for the flag now."

"She hath none."

"Nor any other sign?"

"She hath a sail set, and is of three banks, and cometh swiftly—that is all I can say of her."

"A Roman in triumph would have out many flags. She must be an enemy. Hear now," said Arrius, becoming grave again, "hear, while yet I may speak. If the galley be a pirate, thy life is safe; they may not give thee freedom; they may put thee to the oar again; but they will not kill thee. On the other hand, I—"

The tribune faltered.

"Perpol!" he continued, resolutely. "I am too old to submit to dishonor. In Rome let them tell how Quintus Arrius, as became a Roman tribune, went down with his ship in the midst of the foe. This is what I would have thee do. If the galley prove a pirate, push me from the plank and drown me. Dost thou hear? Swear thou wilt do it."

"I will not swear," said Ben-Hur, firmly; "neither will I do the deed. The Law, which is to me most binding, O tribune, would make me answerable for thy life. Take back the ring"—he took the seal from his finger—"take it back, and all thy promises of favor in the event of delivery from this peril. The judgment which sent me to the oar for life made me a slave, yet I am not a slave; no more am I thy freedman. I am a son of Israel, and this moment, at least, my own master. Take back the ring."

Arrius remained passive.

"Thou wilt not?" Judah continued. "Not in anger, then, nor in any despite, but to free myself from a hateful obligation, I will give thy gift to the sea. See, O tribune!"

He tossed the ring away. Arrius heard the splash where it struck and sank, though he did not look.

"Thou hast done a foolish thing," he said; "foolish for one placed as thou art. I am not dependent upon thee for death. Life is a thread I can break without thy help; and, if I do, what will become of thee? Men determined on death prefer it at the hands of others, for the reason that the soul which Plato giveth us is rebellious at the thought of self-destruction; that is all. If the ship be a pirate, I will escape from the world. My mind is fixed. I am a Roman. Success and honor are all in all. Yet I would have served thee; thou wouldst not. The ring was the only witness of my will available in this situation. We are both lost. I will die regretting the victory and glory wrested from me; thou wilt live to die a little later, mourning the pious duties undone because of this folly. I pity thee."

Ben-Hur saw the consequences of his act more distinctly than before, yet he did not falter.

"In the three years of my servitude, O tribune, thou wert the first to look upon me kindly. No, no! There was another." The voice dropped, the eyes became humid, and he saw plainly as if it were then before him the face of the boy who helped him to a drink by the

old well at Nazareth. "At least," he proceeded, "thou wert the first to ask me who I was; and if, when I reached out and caught thee, blind and sinking the last time, I, too, had thought of the many ways in which thou couldst be useful to me in my wretchedness, still the act was not all selfish; this I pray you to believe. Moreover, seeing as God giveth me to now, the ends I dream of are to be wrought by fair means alone. As a thing of conscience, I would rather die with thee than be thy slayer. My mind is firmly set as thine; though thou wert to offer me all Rome, O tribune, and it belonged to thee to make the gift good, I would not kill thee. Thy Cato and Brutus were as little children compared to the Hebrew whose law a Jew must obey."

"But my request. Hast—"

"Thy command would be of more weight, and that would not move me. I have said."

Both became silent, waiting.

Ben-Hur looked often at the coming ship. Arrius rested with closed eyes, indifferent.

"Art thou sure she is an enemy?" Ben-Hur asked.

"I think so," was the reply.

"She stops, and puts a boat over the side."

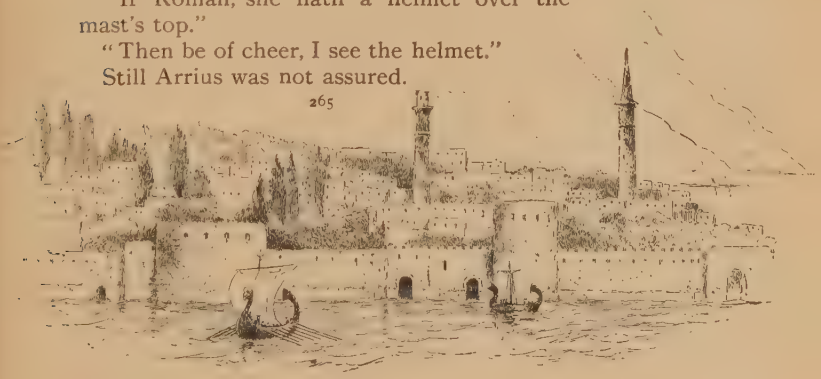
"Dost thou see her flag?"

"Is there no other sign by which she may be known if Roman?"

"If Roman, she hath a helmet over the mast's top."

"Then be of cheer, I see the helmet."

Still Arrius was not assured.



"The men in the small boat are taking in the people afloat. Pirates are not humane."

"They may need rowers," Arrius replied, recurring, possibly, to times when he had made rescues for the purpose.

Ben-Hur was very watchful of the actions of the strangers.

"The ship moves off," he said.

"Whither?"

"Over on our right there is a galley which I take to be deserted. The new-comer heads towards it. Now she is alongside. Now she is sending men aboard."

Then Arrius opened his eyes and threw off his calm.

"Thank thou thy God," he said to Ben-Hur, after a look at the galleys, "thank thou thy God, as I do my many gods. A pirate would sink, not save, yon ship. By the act and the helmet on the mast I know a Roman. The victory is mine. Fortune hath not deserted me. We are saved. Wave thy hand—call to them—bring them quickly. I shall be duumvir, and thou! I knew thy father, and loved him. He was a prince indeed. He taught me a Jew was not a barbarian. I will take thee with me. I will make thee my son. Give thy God thanks, and call the sailors. Haste! The pursuit must be kept. Not a robber shall escape. Hasten them!"

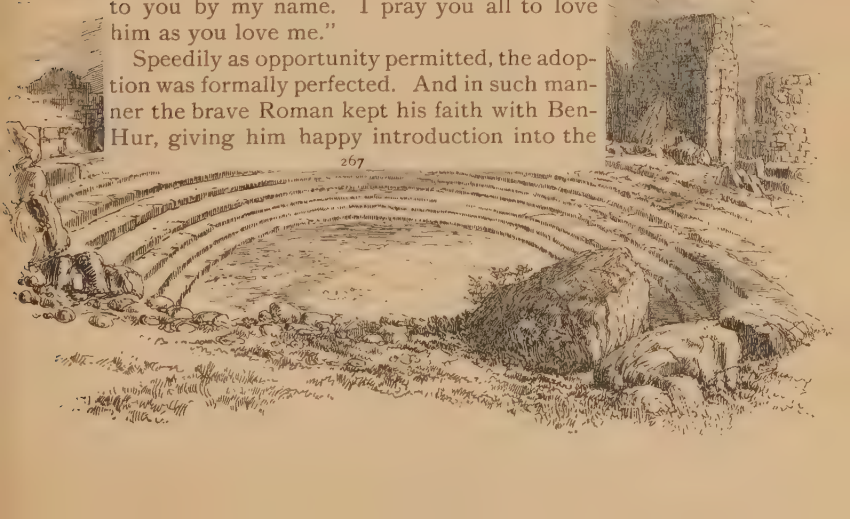
Judah raised himself upon the plank, and waved his hand, and called with all his might; at last he drew the attention of the sailors in the small boat, and they were speedily taken up.

Arrius was received on the galley with all the honors due a hero so the favorite of Fortune. Upon a couch on the deck he heard the particulars of the conclusion of the fight. When the survivors afloat upon the water were all saved and the prize secured, he spread his flag of commandant anew, and hurried northward to rejoin the fleet and perfect the victory. In due time the fifty vessels coming down the channel closed in upon the fugitive pirates, and crushed them utterly; not one escaped. To swell the tribune's glory, twenty galleys of the enemy were captured.

Upon his return from the cruise, Arrius had warm welcome on the mole at Misenum. The young man attending him very early attracted the attention of his friends there; and to their questions as to who he was the tribune proceeded in the most affectionate manner to tell the story of his rescue and introduce the stranger, omitting carefully all that pertained to the latter's previous history. At the end of the narrative he called Ben-Hur to him, and said, with a hand resting affectionately upon his shoulder:

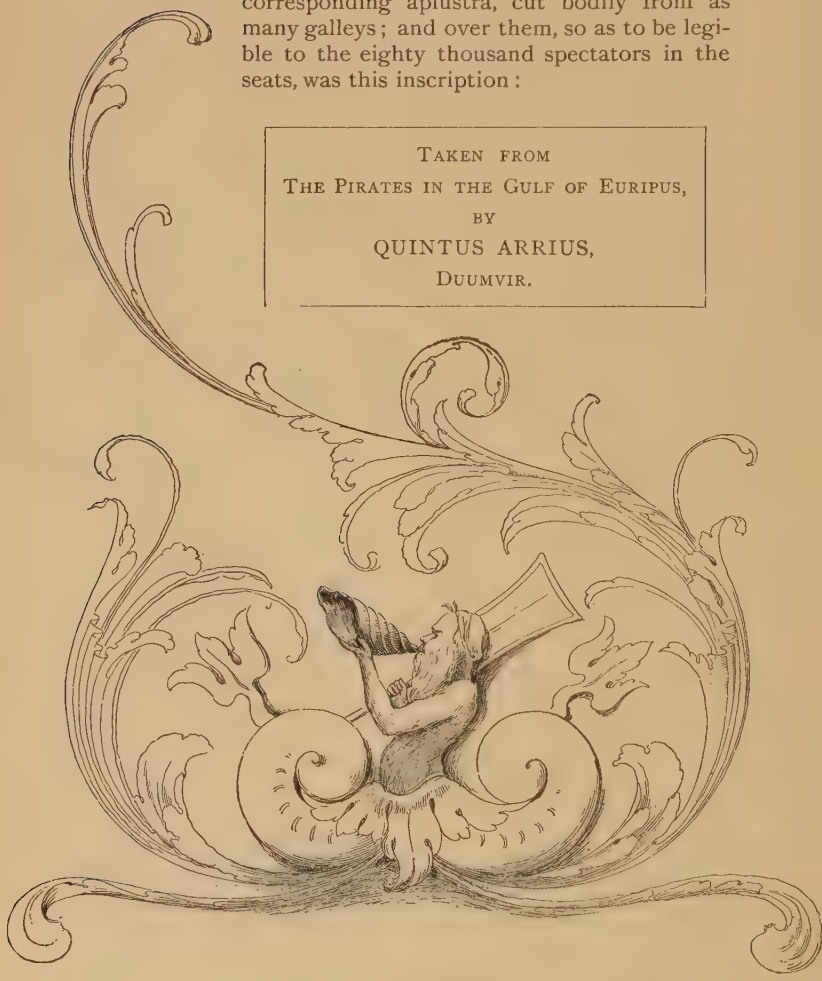
"Good friends, this is my son and heir, who, as he is to take my property—if it be the will of the gods that I leave any—shall be known to you by my name. I pray you all to love him as you love me."

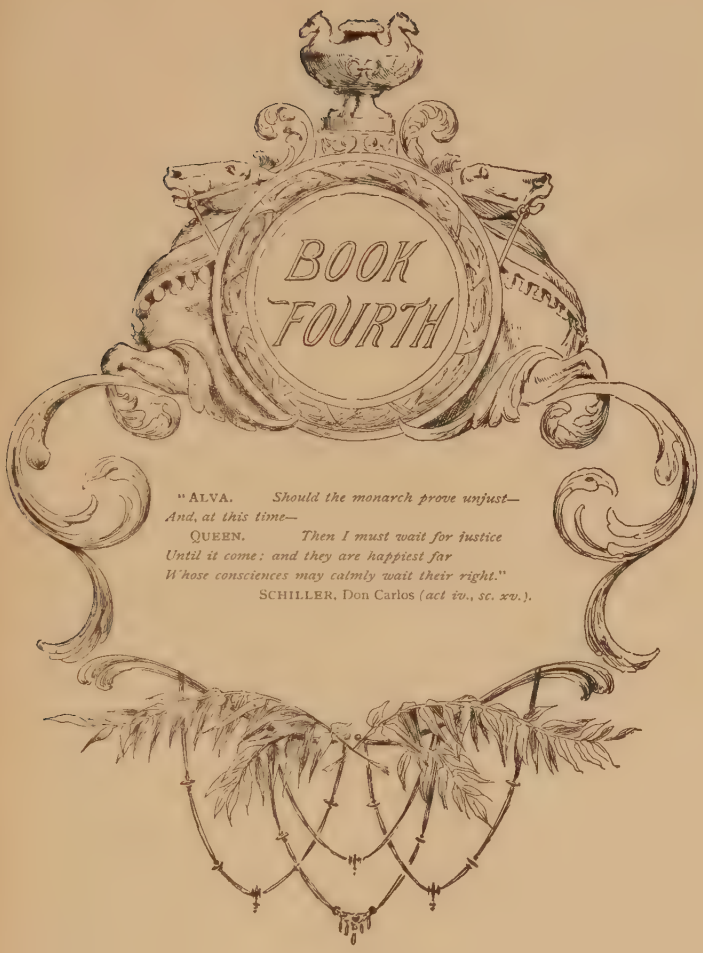
Speedily as opportunity permitted, the adoption was formally perfected. And in such manner the brave Roman kept his faith with Ben-Hur, giving him happy introduction into the



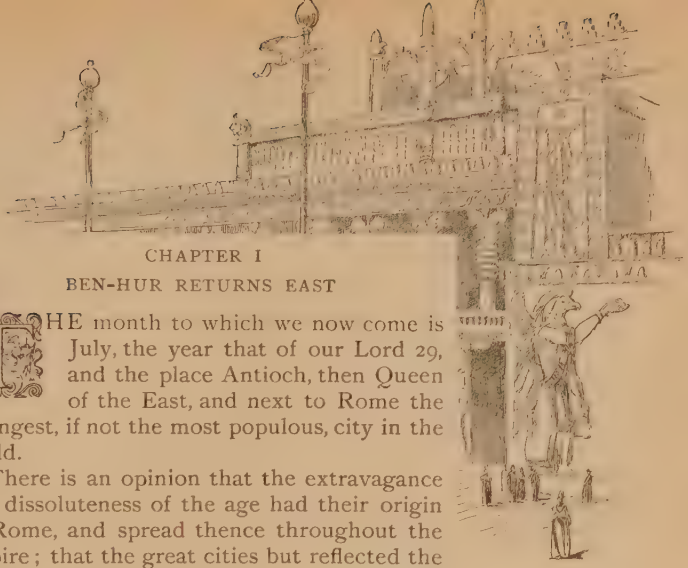
imperial world. The month succeeding Arrius's return, the armilustrium was celebrated with the utmost magnificence in the theatre of Scaurus. One side of the structure was taken up with military trophies; among which by far the most conspicuous and most admired were twenty prows, complemented by their corresponding aplustra, cut bodily from as many galleys; and over them, so as to be legible to the eighty thousand spectators in the seats, was this inscription:

TAKEN FROM
THE PIRATES IN THE GULF OF EURIPUS,
BY
QUINTUS ARRIUS,
DUUMVIR.





"ALVA. *Should the monarch prove unjust—*
And, at this time—
QUEEN. *Then I must wait for justice*
Until it come: and they are happiest far
Whose consciences may calmly wait their right."
SCHILLER, Don Carlos *(act iv., sc. xv.)*.



CHAPTER I

BEN-HUR RETURNS EAST

THE month to which we now come is July, the year that of our Lord 29, and the place Antioch, then Queen of the East, and next to Rome the strongest, if not the most populous, city in the world.

There is an opinion that the extravagance and dissoluteness of the age had their origin in Rome, and spread thence throughout the empire; that the great cities but reflected the manners of their mistress on the Tiber. This may be doubted. The reaction of the conquest would seem to have been upon the morals of the conqueror. In Greece she found a spring of corruption; so also in Egypt; and the student, having exhausted the subject, will close the books assured that the flow of the demoralizing river was from the East westwardly, and that this very city of Antioch, one of the oldest seats of Assyrian power and splendor, was a principal source of the deadly stream.

A transport galley entered the mouth of the river Orontes from the blue waters of the sea. It was in the forenoon. The heat was great, yet all on board who could avail themselves of the privilege were on deck—Ben-Hur among others,

The five years had brought the young Jew to perfect manhood. Though the robe of white linen in which he was attired somewhat masked his form, his appearance was unusually attractive. For an hour and more he had occupied a seat in the shade of the sail, and in that time several fellow-passengers of his own nationality had tried to engage him in conversation, but without avail. His replies to their questions had been brief, though gravely courteous, and in the Latin tongue. The purity of his speech, his cultivated manners, his reticence, served to stimulate their curiosity the more. Such as observed him closely were struck by an incongruity between his demeanor, which had the ease and grace of a patrician, and certain points of his person. Thus, his arms were disproportionately long; and when, to steady himself against the motion of the vessel, he took hold of anything near by, the size of his hands and their evident power compelled remark; so the wonder who and what he was mixed continually with a wish to know the particulars of his life. In other words, his air cannot be better described than as a notice —This man has a story to tell.

The galley, in coming, had stopped at one of the ports of Cyprus, and picked up a Hebrew of most respectable appearance, quiet, reserved, paternal. Ben-Hur ventured to ask him some questions; the replies won his confidence, and resulted finally in an extended conversation.

It chanced, also, that as the galley from Cy-

prus entered the receiving bay of the Orontes, two other vessels which had been sighted out in the sea met it and passed into the river at the same time; and as they did so both the strangers threw out small flags of brightest yellow. There was much conjecture as to the meaning of the signals. At length a passenger addressed himself to the respectable Hebrew for information upon the subject.

"Yes, I know the meaning of the flags," he replied; "they do not signify nationality — they are merely marks of ownership."

"Has the owner many ships?"

"He has."

"You know him?"

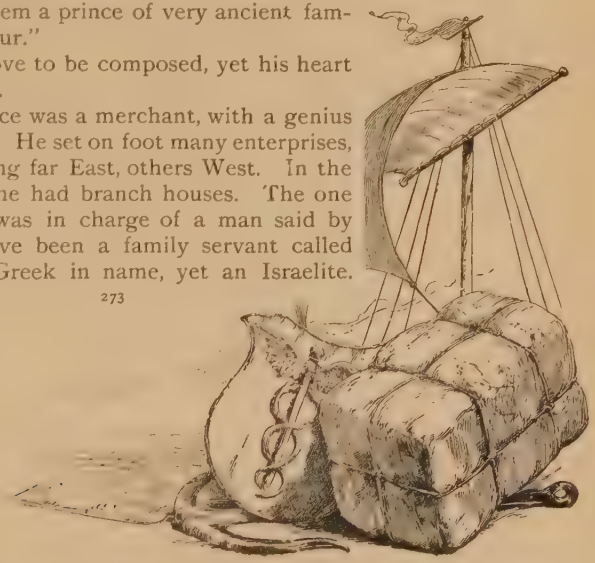
"I have dealt with him."

The passengers looked at the speaker as if requesting him to go on. Ben-Hur listened with interest.

"He lives in Antioch," the Hebrew continued, in his quiet way. "That he is vastly rich has brought him into notice, and the talk about him is not always kind. There used to be in Jerusalem a prince of very ancient family named Hur."

Judah strove to be composed, yet his heart beat quicker.

"The prince was a merchant, with a genius for business. He set on foot many enterprises, some reaching far East, others West. In the great cities he had branch houses. The one in Antioch was in charge of a man said by some to have been a family servant called Simonides, Greek in name, yet an Israelite.



The master was drowned at sea. His business, however, went on, and was scarcely less prosperous. After a while misfortune overtook the family. The prince's only son, nearly grown, tried to kill the procurator Gratus in one of the streets of Jerusalem. He failed by a narrow chance, and has not since been heard of. In fact, the Roman's rage took in the whole house—not one of the name was left alive. Their palace was sealed up, and is now a rookery for pigeons; the estate was confiscated; everything that could be traced to the ownership of the Hurs was confiscated. The procurator cured his hurt with a golden salve."

The passengers laughed.

"You mean he kept the property," said one of them.

"They say so," the Hebrew replied; "I am only telling a story as I received it. And, to go on, Simonides, who had been the prince's agent here in Antioch, opened trade in a short time on his own account, and in a space incredibly brief became the master-merchant of the city. In imitation of his master, he sent caravans to India; and on the sea at present he has galleys enough to make a royal fleet. They say nothing goes amiss with him. His camels do not die, except of old age; his ships never founder; if he throw a chip into the river, it will come back to him gold."

"How long has he been going on thus?"

"Not ten years."

"He must have had a good start."

"Yes, they say the procurator took only the

A PALANQUIN OF THE DESERT

prince's property ready at hand—his horses, cattle, houses, land, vessels, goods. The money could not be found, though there must have been vast sums of it. What became of it has been an unsolved mystery."

"Not to me," said a passenger, with a sneer.

"I understand you," the Hebrew answered. "Others have had your idea. That it furnished old Simonides his start is a common belief. The procurator is of that opinion—or he has been—for twice in five years he has caught the merchant, and put him to torture."

Judah griped the rope he was holding with crushing force.

"It is said," the narrator continued, "that there is not a sound bone in the man's body. The last time I saw him he sat in a chair, a shapeless cripple, propped against cushions."

"So tortured!" exclaimed several listeners in a breath.

"Disease could not have produced such a deformity. Still the suffering made no impression upon him. All he had was his lawfully, and he was making lawful use of it—that was the most they wrung from him. Now, however, he is past persecution. He has a license to trade signed by Tiberius himself."

"He paid roundly for it, I warrant."

"These ships are his," the Hebrew continued, passing the remark. "It is a custom among his sailors to salute each other upon meeting by throwing out yellow flags, the sight of which is as much as to say, 'We have had a fortunate voyage.'"

The story ended there.

When the transport was fairly in the channel of the river, Judah spoke to the Hebrew.

"What was the name of the merchant's master?"

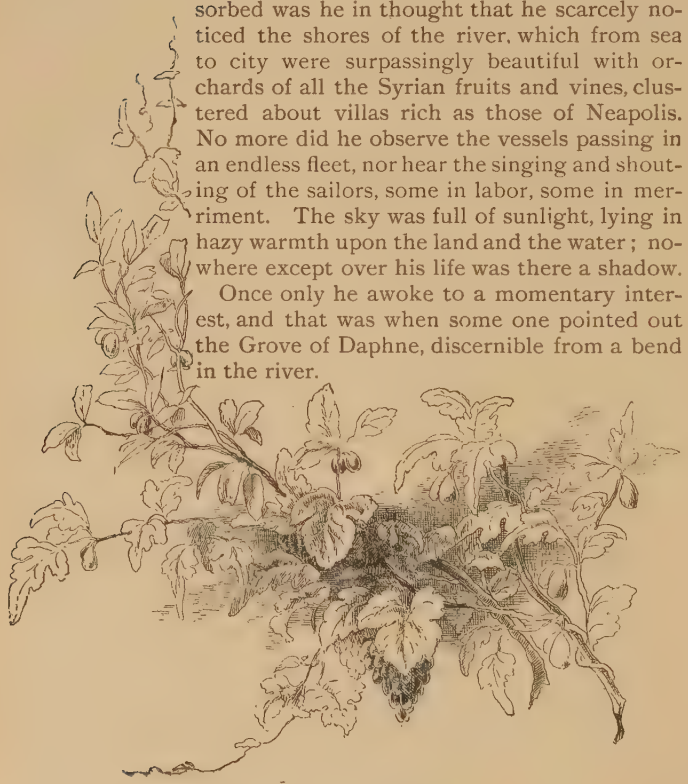
"Ben-Hur, Prince of Jerusalem."

"What became of the prince's family?"

"The boy was sent to the galleys. I may say he is dead. One year is the ordinary limit of life under that sentence. The widow and daughter have not been heard of; those who know what became of them will not speak. They died doubtless in the cells of one of the castles which spot the way-sides of Judea."

Judah walked to the pilot's quarter. So absorbed was he in thought that he scarcely noticed the shores of the river, which from sea to city were surpassingly beautiful with orchards of all the Syrian fruits and vines, clustered about villas rich as those of Neapolis. No more did he observe the vessels passing in an endless fleet, nor hear the singing and shouting of the sailors, some in labor, some in merriment. The sky was full of sunlight, lying in hazy warmth upon the land and the water; nowhere except over his life was there a shadow.

Once only he awoke to a momentary interest, and that was when some one pointed out the Grove of Daphne, discernible from a bend in the river.



CHAPTER II

ON THE ORONTES

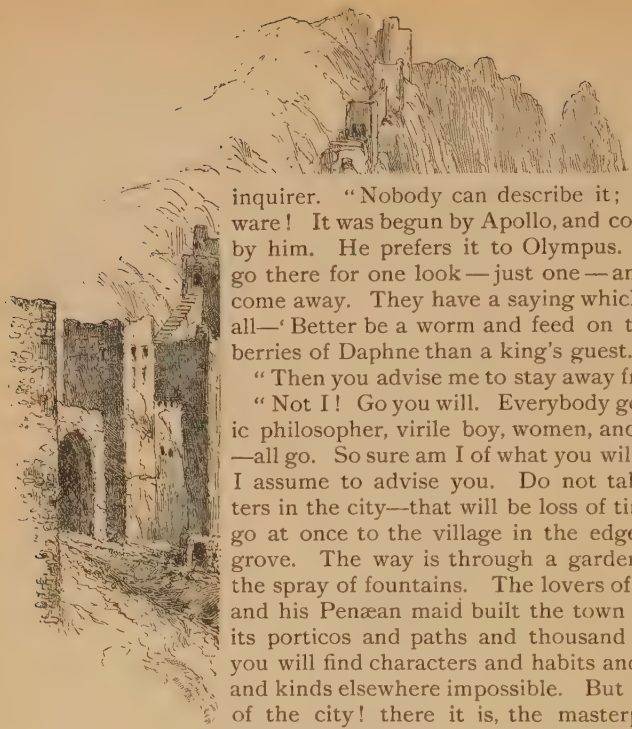
WHEN the city came into view, the passengers were on deck, eager that nothing of the scene might escape them. The respectable Jew already introduced to the reader was the principal spokesman.

"The river here runs to the west," he said, in the way of general answer. "I remember when it washed the base of the walls; but as Roman subjects we have lived in peace, and, as always happens in such times, trade has had its will; now the whole river front is taken up with wharves and docks. Yonder"—the speaker pointed southward—"is Mount Caius, or, as these people love to call it, the Mountains of Orontes, looking across to its brother Amnus in the north; and between them lies the Plain of Antioch. Farther on are the Black Mountains, whence the Ducts of the Kings bring the purest water to wash the thirsty streets and people; yet they are forests in a wilderness state, dense, and full of birds and beasts."

"Where is the lake?" one asked.

"Over north there. You can take horse, if you wish to see it—or, better, a boat, for a tributary connects it with the river."

"The Grove of Daphne!" he said, to a third



inquirer. "Nobody can describe it; only beware! It was begun by Apollo, and completed by him. He prefers it to Olympus. People go there for one look — just one — and never come away. They have a saying which tells it all—'Better be a worm and feed on the mulberries of Daphne than a king's guest.'"

"Then you advise me to stay away from it?"

"Not I! Go you will. Everybody goes, cynic philosopher, virile boy, women, and priests —all go. So sure am I of what you will do that I assume to advise you. Do not take quarters in the city—that will be loss of time; but go at once to the village in the edge of the grove. The way is through a garden, under the spray of fountains. The lovers of the god and his Penæan maid built the town; and in its porticos and paths and thousand retreats you will find characters and habits and sweets and kinds elsewhere impossible. But the wall of the city! there it is, the masterpiece of Xeræus, the master of mural architecture."

All eyes followed his pointing finger.

"This part was raised by order of the first of the Seleucidæ. Three hundred years have made it part of the rock it rests upon."

The defence justified the encomium. High, solid, and with many bold angles, it curved southwardly out of view.

"On the top there are four hundred towers, each a reservoir of water," the Hebrew continued. "Look now! Over the wall, tall as it is, see in the distance two hills, which you may know as the rival crests of Sulpius. The struct-

ure on the farthest one is the citadel, garrisoned all the year round by a Roman legion. Opposite it this way rises the Temple of Jupiter, and under that the front of the legate's residence—a palace full of offices, and yet a fortress against which a mob would dash harmlessly as a south wind."

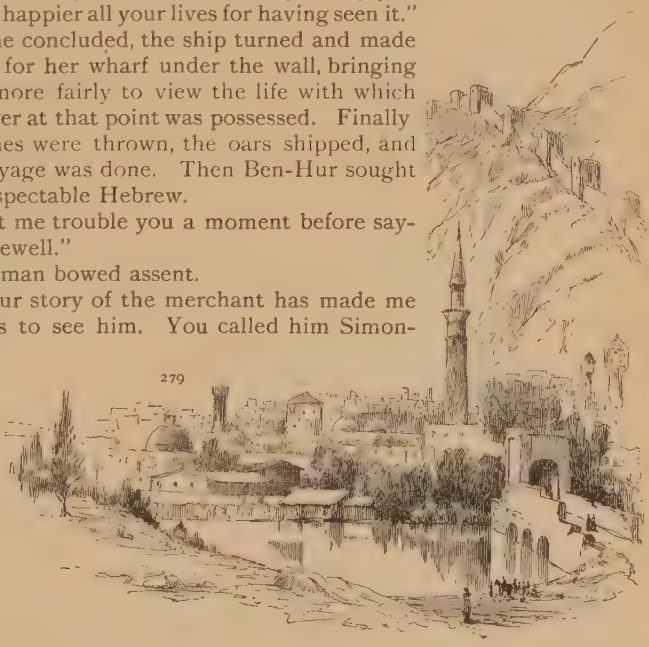
At this point the sailors began taking in sail, whereupon the Hebrew exclaimed, heartily, 'See! you who hate the sea, and you who have vows, get ready your curses and your prayers. The bridge yonder, over which the road to Seleucia is carried, marks the limit of navigation. What the ship unloads for further transit, the camel takes up there. Above the bridge begins the island upon which Calinicus built his new city, connecting it with five great viaducts so solid time has made no impression upon them, nor floods nor earthquakes. Of the main town, my friends, I have only to say you will be happier all your lives for having seen it."

As he concluded, the ship turned and made slowly for her wharf under the wall, bringing even more fairly to view the life with which the river at that point was possessed. Finally the lines were thrown, the oars shipped, and the voyage was done. Then Ben-Hur sought the respectable Hebrew.

"Let me trouble you a moment before saying farewell."

The man bowed assent.

"Your story of the merchant has made me curious to see him. You called him Simonides?"



"Yes. He is a Jew with a Greek name."

"Where is he to be found?"

The acquaintance gave a sharp look before he answered,

"I may save you mortification. He is not a money-lender."

"Nor am I a money-borrower," said Ben-Hur, smiling at the other's shrewdness.

The man raised his head and considered an instant.

"One would think," he then replied, "that the richest merchant in Antioch would have a house for business corresponding to his wealth; but if you would find him in the day, follow the river to yon bridge, under which he quarters in a building that looks like a buttress of the wall. Before the door there is an immense landing, always covered with cargoes come and to go. The fleet that lies moored there is his. You cannot fail to find him."

"I give you thanks."

"The peace of our fathers go with you."

"And with you."

With that they separated.

Two street-porters, loaded with his baggage, received Ben-Hur's orders upon the wharf.

"To the citadel," he said; a direction which implied an official military connection.

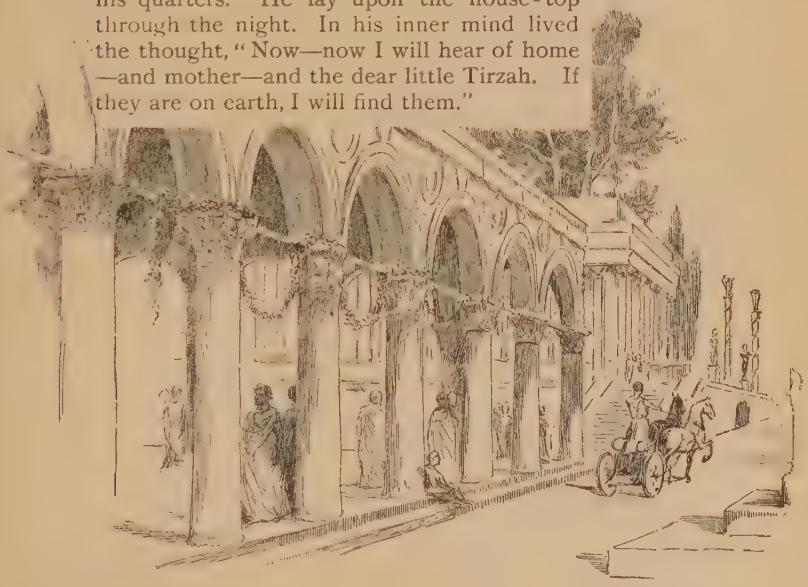
Two great streets, cutting each other at right angles, divided the city into quarters. A curious and immense structure, called the Nymphæum, arose at the foot of the one running north and south. When the porters turned

south there, the new-comer, though fresh from Rome, was amazed at the magnificence of the avenue. On the right and left there were palaces, and between them extended indefinitely double colonnades of marble, leaving separate ways for footmen, beasts, and chariots; the whole under shade, and cooled by fountains of incessant flow.

Ben-Hur was not in mood to enjoy the spectacle. The story of Simonides haunted him. Arrived at the Omphalus — a monument of four arches wide as the streets, superbly illustrated, and erected to himself by Epiphanes, the eighth of the Seleucidæ — he suddenly changed his mind.

"I will not go to the citadel to-night," he said to the porters. "Take me to the khan nearest the bridge on the road to Seleucia."

The party faced about, and in good time he was deposited in a public-house of primitive but ample construction, within stone's-throw of the bridge under which old Simonides had his quarters. He lay upon the house-top through the night. In his inner mind lived the thought, "Now—now I will hear of home —and mother—and the dear little Tirzah. If they are on earth, I will find them."



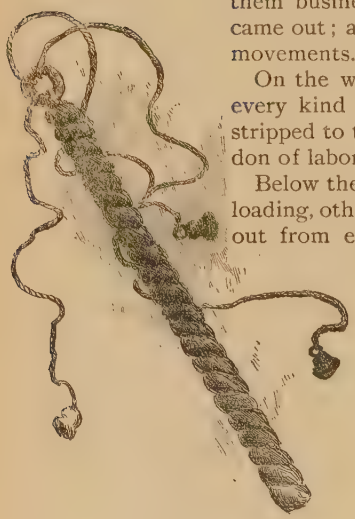
CHAPTER III

THE DEMAND ON SIMONIDES

NEXT day early, to the neglect of the city, Ben-Hur sought the house of Simonides. Through an embattled gate-way he passed to a continuity of wharves; thence up the river midst a busy press, to the Seleucian Bridge, under which he paused to take in the scene.

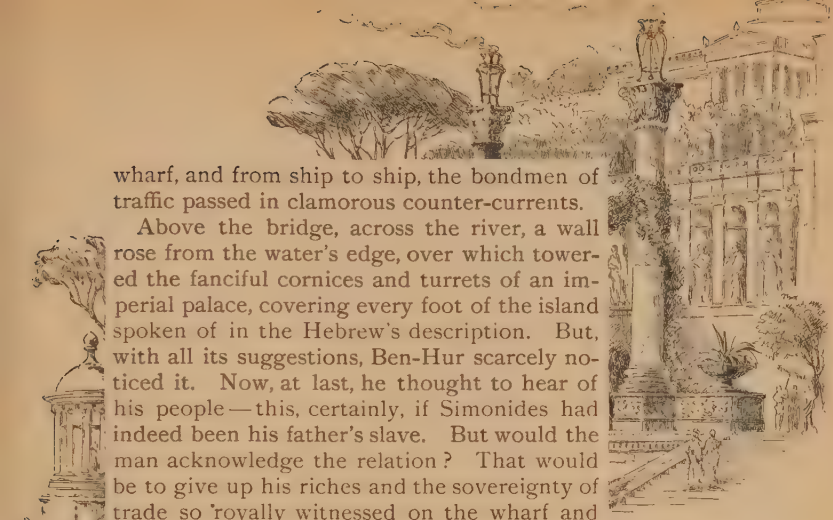
There, directly under the bridge, was the merchant's house, a mass of gray stone, unhewn, referable to no style, looking, as the voyager had described it, like a buttress of the wall against which it leaned. Two immense doors in front communicated with the wharf. Some holes near the top, heavily barred, served as windows. Weeds waved from the crevices, and in places black moss splotched the otherwise bald stones.

The doors were open. Through one of them business went in; through the other it came out; and there was hurry, hurry in all its movements.



On the wharf there were piles of goods in every kind of package, and groups of slaves, stripped to the waist, going about in the abandon of labor.

Below the bridge lay a fleet of galleys, some loading, others unloading. A yellow flag blew out from each mast-head. From fleet and



wharf, and from ship to ship, the bondmen of traffic passed in clamorous counter-currents.

Above the bridge, across the river, a wall rose from the water's edge, over which towered the fanciful cornices and turrets of an imperial palace, covering every foot of the island spoken of in the Hebrew's description. But, with all its suggestions, Ben-Hur scarcely noticed it. Now, at last, he thought to hear of his people — this, certainly, if Simonides had indeed been his father's slave. But would the man acknowledge the relation? That would be to give up his riches and the sovereignty of trade so royally witnessed on the wharf and river. And what was of still greater consequence to the merchant, it would be to forego his career in the midst of amazing success, and yield himself voluntarily once more a slave. Simple thought of the demand seemed a monstrous audacity. Stripped of diplomatic address, it was to say, You are my slave; give me all you have, and—yourself.

Yet Ben-Hur derived strength for the interview from faith in his rights and the hope uppermost in his heart. If the story to which he was yielding were true, Simonides belonged to him, with all he had. For the wealth, be it said in justice, he cared nothing. When he started to the door determined in mind, it was with a promise to himself—"Let him tell me of mother and Tirzah, and I will give him his freedom without account."

He passed boldly into the house.

The interior was that of a vast depot where,

in ordered spaces, and under careful arrangement, goods of every kind were heaped and pent. Though the light was murky and the air stifling, men moved about briskly; and in places he saw workmen with saws and hammers making packages for shipments. Down a path between the piles he walked slowly, wondering if the man of whose genius there were here such abounding proofs could have been his father's slave? If so, to what class had he belonged? If a Jew, was he the son of a servant? Or was he a debtor or a debtor's son? Or had he been sentenced and sold for theft? These thoughts, as they passed, in nowise disturbed the growing respect for the merchant of which he was each instant more and more conscious. A peculiarity of our admiration for another is that it is always looking for circumstances to justify itself.

At length a man approached and spoke to him.

"What would you have?"

"I would see Simonides, the merchant."

"Will you come this way?"

By a number of paths left in the stowage, they finally came to a flight of steps; ascending which, he found himself on the roof of the depot, and in front of a structure which cannot be better described than as a lesser stone house built upon another, invisible from the landing below, and out west of the bridge under the open sky. The roof, hemmed in by a low wall, seemed like a terrace, which, to his astonishment, was brilliant with flowers; in

the rich surrounding, the house sat squat, a plain square block, unbroken except by a doorway in front. A dustless path led to the door, through a bordering of shrubs of Persian rose in perfect bloom. Breathing a sweet attar-perfume, he followed the guide.

At the end of a darkened passage within, they stopped before a curtain half-parted. The man called out,

"A stranger to see the master."

A clear voice replied, "In God's name, let him enter."

A Roman might have called the apartment into which the visitor was ushered his atrium. The walls were panelled; each panel was comparted like a modern office-desk, and each compartment crowded with labelled folios all filemot with age and use. Between the panels, and above and below them, were borders of wood once white, now tinted like cream, and carved with marvellous intricacy of design. Above a cornice of gilded balls, the ceiling rose in pavilion style until it broke into a shallow dome set with hundreds of panes of violet mica, permitting a flood of light deliciously reposeful. The floor was carpeted with gray rugs so thick that an invading foot fell half-buried and soundless.

In the midlight of the room were two persons—a man resting in a chair high-backed, broad-armed, and lined with pliant cushions; and at his left, leaning against the back of the chair, a girl well forward into womanhood. At sight of them Ben-Hur felt the blood red-

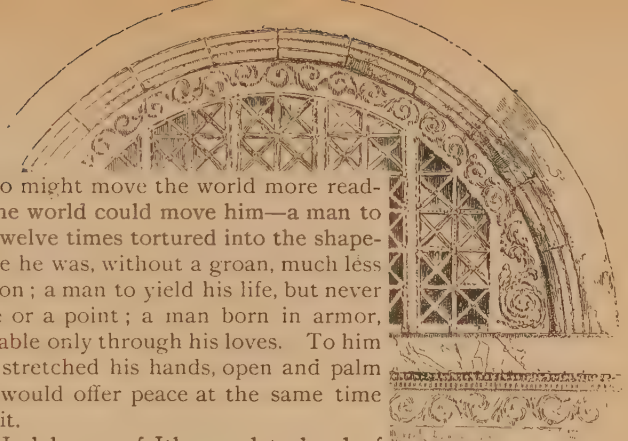
den his forehead; bowing, as much to recover himself as in respect, he lost the lifting of the hands, and the shiver and shrink with which the sitter caught sight of him—an emotion as swift to go as it had been to come. When he raised his eyes the two were in the same position, except the girl's hand had fallen and was resting lightly upon the elder's shoulder; both of them were regarding him fixedly.

"If you are Simonides, the merchant, and a Jew"—Ben-Hur stopped an instant—"then the peace of the God of our father Abraham upon you and—yours."

The last word was addressed to the girl.

"I am the Simonides of whom you speak, by birthright a Jew," the man made answer, in a voice singularly clear. "I am Simonides, and a Jew; and I return you your salutation, with prayer to know who calls upon me."

Ben-Hur looked as he listened, and where the figure of the man should have been in healthful roundness, there was only a formless heap sunk in the depths of the cushions, and covered by a quilted robe of sombre silk. Over the heap shone a head royally proportioned—the ideal head of a statesman and conqueror—a head broad of base and dome-like in front, such as Angelo would have modelled for Cæsar. White hair dropped in thin locks over the white brows, deepening the blackness of the eyes shining through them like sullen lights. The face was bloodless, and much puffed with folds, especially under the chin. In other words, the head and face were those of



a man who might move the world more readily than the world could move him—a man to be twice twelve times tortured into the shapeless cripple he was, without a groan, much less a confession; a man to yield his life, but never a purpose or a point; a man born in armor, and assailable only through his loves. To him Ben-Hur stretched his hands, open and palm up, as he would offer peace at the same time he asked it.

"I am Judah, son of Ithamar, late head of the House of Hur, and a prince of Jerusalem."

The merchant's right hand lay outside the robe—a long, thin hand, articulate to deformity with suffering. It closed tightly; otherwise there was not the slightest expression of feeling of any kind on his part; nothing to warrant an inference of surprise or interest; nothing but this calm answer,

"The princes of Jerusalem, of the pure blood, are always welcome in my house; you are welcome. Give the young man a seat, Esther."

The girl took an ottoman near by, and carried it to Ben-Hur. As she arose from placing the seat, their eyes met. "The peace of our Lord with you," she said, modestly. "Be seated and at rest."

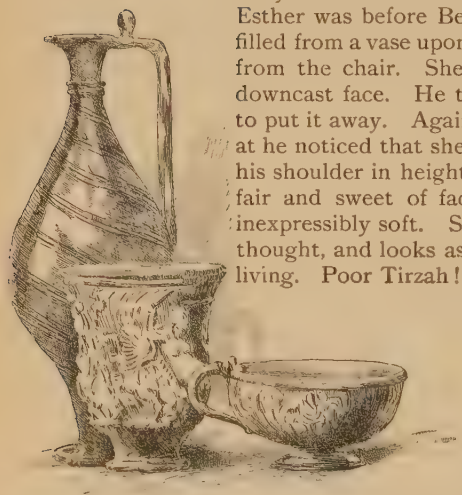
When she resumed her place by the chair, she had not divined his purpose. The powers of woman go not so far; if the matter is of finer feeling, such as pity, mercy, sympathy, that she detects; and therein is a difference between her and man which will endure as long as she remains, by nature, alive to such

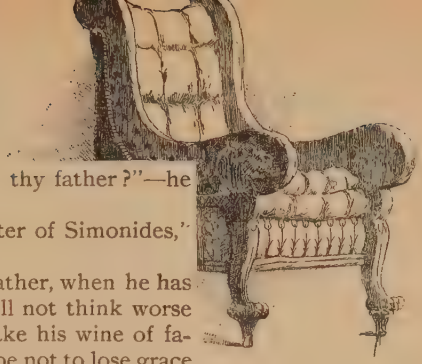
feelings. She was simply sure he brought some wound of life for healing.

Ben-Hur did not take the offered seat, but said, deferentially, "I pray the good master Simonides that he will not hold me an intruder. Coming up the river yesterday, I heard he knew my father."

"I knew the Prince Hur. We were associated in some enterprises lawful to merchants who find profit in lands beyond the sea and the desert. But sit, I pray you—and, Esther, some wine for the young man. Nehemiah speaks of a son of Hur who once ruled the half part of Jerusalem; an old house; very old, by the faith! In the days of Moses and Joshua even some of them found favor in the sight of the Lord, and divided honors with those princes among men. It can hardly be that their descendant, lineally come to us, will refuse a cup of wine-fat of the genuine vine of Sorek, grown on the south hill-sides of Hebron."

By the time of the conclusion of this speech, Esther was before Ben-Hur with a silver cup filled from a vase upon a table a little removed from the chair. She offered the drink with downcast face. He touched her hand gently to put it away. Again their eyes met; whereat he noticed that she was small, not nearly to his shoulder in height; but very graceful, and fair and sweet of face, with eyes black and inexpressibly soft. She is kind and pretty, he thought, and looks as Tirzah would were she living. Poor Tirzah! Then he said aloud,





"No, thy father—if he is thy father?"—he paused.

"I am Esther, the daughter of Simonides," she said, with dignity.

"Then, fair Esther, thy father, when he has heard my further speech, will not think worse of me if yet I am slow to take his wine of famous extract; nor less I hope not to lose grace in thy sight. Stand thou here with me a moment!"

Both of them, as in common cause, turned to the merchant. "Simonides!" he said, firmly, "my father, at his death, had a trusted servant of thy name, and it has been told me that thou art the man!"

There was a sudden start of the wrenched limbs under the robe, and the thin hand clinched.

"Esther, Esther!" the man called, sternly; "here, not there, as thou art thy mother's child and mine—here, not there, I say!"

The girl looked once from father to visitor; then she replaced the cup upon the table, and went dutifully to the chair. Her countenance sufficiently expressed her wonder and alarm.

Simonides lifted his left hand and gave it into hers, lying lovingly upon his shoulder, and said, dispassionately, "I have grown old in dealing with men—old before my time. If he who told thee that whereof thou speakest was a friend acquainted with my history, and spoke of it not harshly, he must have persuaded thee that I could not be else than a man distrustful of my kind. The God of Israel help him who.

at the end of life, is constrained to acknowledge so much! My loves are few, but they are. One of them is a soul which"—he carried the hand holding his to his lips, in manner unmistakable—"a soul which to this time has been unselfishly mine, and such sweet comfort that, were it taken from me, I would die."

Esther's head drooped until her cheek touched his.

"The other love is but a memory; of which I will say further that, like a benison of the Lord, it hath a compass to contain a whole family, if only"—his voice lowered and trembled—"if only I knew where they were."

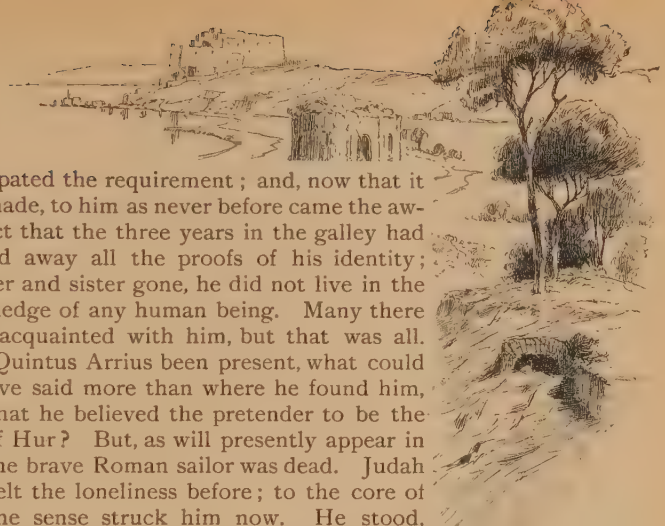
Ben-Hur's face suffused, and, advancing a step, he cried, impulsively, "My mother and sister! Oh, it is of them you speak!"

Esther, as if spoken to, raised her head; but Simonides returned to his calm, and answered, coldly, "Hear me to the end. Because I am that I am, and because of the loves of which I have spoken, before I make return to thy demand touching my relations to the Prince Hur, and as something which of right should come first, do thou show me proofs of who thou art. Is thy witness in writing? Or cometh it in person?"

The demand was plain, and the right of it indisputable. Ben-Hur blushed, clasped his hands, stammered, and turned away at loss. Simonides pressed him.

"The proofs, the proofs, I say! Set them before me—lay them in my hands!"

Yet Ben-Hur made no answer. He had not



anticipated the requirement; and, now that it was made, to him as never before came the awful fact that the three years in the galley had carried away all the proofs of his identity; mother and sister gone, he did not live in the knowledge of any human being. Many there were acquainted with him, but that was all. Had Quintus Arrius been present, what could he have said more than where he found him, and that he believed the pretender to be the son of Hur? But, as will presently appear in full, the brave Roman sailor was dead. Judah had felt the loneliness before; to the core of life the sense struck him now. He stood, hands clasped, face averted, in stupefaction. Simonides respected his suffering, and waited in silence.

"Master Simonides," he said, at length, "I can only tell my story; and I will not that unless you stay judgment so long, and with goodwill deign to hear me."

"Speak," said Simonides, now, indeed, master of the situation—"speak, and I will listen the more willingly that I have not denied you to be the very person you claim yourself."

Ben-Hur proceeded then, and told his life hurriedly, yet with the feeling which is the source of all eloquence; but as we are familiar with it down to his landing at Misenum, in company with Arrius, returned victorious from the Ægean, at that point we will take up the words.

"My benefactor was loved and trusted by the emperor, who heaped him with honorable

rewards. The merchants of the East contributed magnificent presents, and he became doubly rich among the rich of Rome. May a Jew forget his religion? or his birthplace, if it were the Holy Land of our fathers? The good man adopted me his son by formal rites of law; and I strove to make him just return: no child was ever more dutiful to father than I to him. He would have had me a scholar; in art, philosophy, rhetoric, oratory, he would have furnished me the most famous teacher. I declined his insistence, because I was a Jew, and could not forget the Lord God, or the glory of the prophets, or the city set on the hills by David and Solomon. Oh, ask you why I accepted any of the benefactions of the Roman? I loved him; next place, I thought I could, with his help, array influences which would enable me one day to unseal the mystery close-locking the fate of my mother and sister; and to these there was yet another motive, of which I shall not speak except to say it controlled me so far that I devoted myself to arms, and the acquisition of everything deemed essential to thorough knowledge of the art of war. In the palæstræ and circuses of the city I toiled, and in the camps no less; and in all of them I have a name, but not that of my fathers. The crowns I won—and on the walls of the villa by Misenum there are many of them—all came to me as the son of Arrius, the duumvir. In that relation only am I known among Romans. . . . In steadfast pursuit of my secret aim, I left Rome for Antioch, intending to ac-

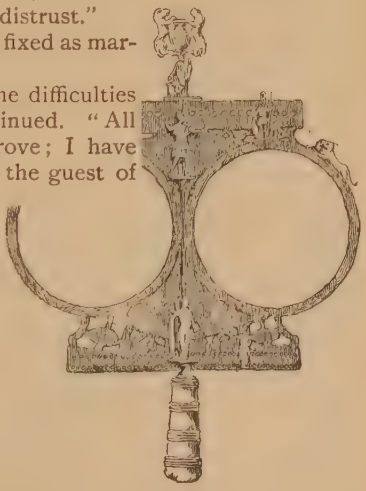
company the Consul Maxentius in the campaign he is organizing against the Parthians. Master of personal skill in all arms, I seek now the higher knowledge pertaining to the conduct of bodies of men in the field. The consul has admitted me one of his military family. But yesterday, as our ship entered the Orontes, two other ships sailed in with us flying yellow flags. A fellow-passenger and countryman from Cyprus explained that the vessels belonged to Simonides, the master-merchant of Antioch; he told us, also, who the merchant was; his marvellous success in commerce; of his fleets and caravans, and their coming and going; and, not knowing I had interest in the theme beyond my associate listeners, he said Simonides was a Jew, once the servant of the Prince Hur; nor did he conceal the cruelties of Gratus, or the purpose of their infliction."

At this allusion Simonides bowed his head, and, as if to help him conceal his feelings and her own deep sympathy, the daughter hid her face on his neck. Directly he raised his eyes, and said, in a clear voice, "I am listening."

"O good Simonides!" Ben-Hur then said, advancing a step, his whole soul seeking expression, "I see thou art not convinced, and that yet I stand in the shadow of thy distrust."

The merchant held his features fixed as marble, and his tongue as still.

"And not less clearly, I see the difficulties of my position," Ben-Hur continued. "All my Roman connection I can prove; I have only to call upon the consul, now the guest of



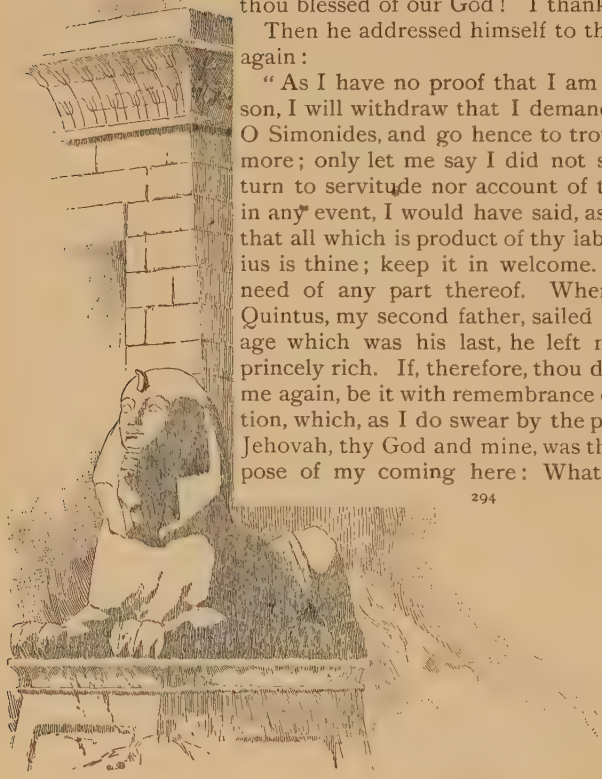
the governor of the city; but I cannot prove the particulars of thy demand upon me. I cannot prove I am my father's son. They who could serve me in that — alas! they are dead or lost."

He covered his face with his hands; whereupon Esther arose, and taking the rejected cup to him, said, "The wine is of the country we all so love. Drink, I pray thee!"

The voice was sweet as that of Rebekah offering drink at the well near Nahor the city; he saw there were tears in her eyes, and he drank, saying, "Daughter of Simonides, thy heart is full of goodness; and merciful art thou to let the stranger share it with thy father. Be thou blessed of our God! I thank thee."

Then he addressed himself to the merchant again:

"As I have no proof that I am my father's son, I will withdraw that I demanded of thee, O Simonides, and go hence to trouble you no more; only let me say I did not seek thy return to servitude nor account of thy fortune; in any event, I would have said, as now I say, that all which is product of thy labor and genius is thine; keep it in welcome. I have no need of any part thereof. When the good Quintus, my second father, sailed on the voyage which was his last, he left me his heir, princely rich. If, therefore, thou dost think of me again, be it with remembrance of this question, which, as I do swear by the prophets and Jehovah, thy God and mine, was the chief purpose of my coming here: What dost thou



know—what canst thou tell me—of my mother and Tirzah, my sister—she who should be in beauty and grace even as this one, thy sweetness of life, if not thy very life? Oh! what canst thou tell me of them?"

The tears ran down Esther's cheeks; but the man was wilful; in a clear voice, he replied,

"I have said I knew the Prince Ben-Hur. I remember hearing of the misfortune which overtook his family. I remember the bitterness with which I heard it. He who wrought such misery to the widow of my friend is the same who, in the same spirit, hath since wrought upon me. I will go further, and say to you, I have made diligent quest concerning the family, but—I have nothing to tell you of them. They are lost."

Ben-Hur uttered a great groan.

"Then—then it is another hope broken!" he said, struggling with his feelings. "I am used to disappointments. I pray you pardon my intrusion; and if I have occasioned you annoyance, forgive it because of my sorrow. I have nothing now to live for but vengeance. Farewell."

At the curtain he turned, and said, simply, "I thank you both."

"Peace go with you," the merchant said.

Esther could not speak for sobbing.

And so he departed.

CHAPTER IV

SIMONIDES AND ESTHER

SCARCELY was Ben-Hur gone, when Simonides seemed to wake as from sleep; his countenance flushed; the sullen light of his eyes changed to brightness; and he said, cheerily,

"Esther, ring—quick!"

She went to the table, and rang a service-bell.

One of the panels in the wall swung back, exposing a door-way which gave admittance to a man who passed round to the merchant's front, and saluted him with a half-salaam.

"Malluch, here—nearer—to the chair," the master said, imperiously. "I have a mission which shall not fail though the sun should. Hearken! A young man is now descending to the storeroom — tall, comely, and in the garb of Israel; follow him, his shadow not more faithful; and every night send me report of where he is, what he does, and the company he keeps; and if, without discovery, you overhear his conversations, report them word for word, together with whatever will serve to expose him, his habits, motives, life. Understand you? Go quickly! Stay, Malluch: if he leave the city, go after him—and, mark you, Malluch, be as a friend. If he bespeak you, tell him what you will to the occasion most

suited, except that you are in my service; of that, not a word. Haste—make haste!"

The man saluted as before, and was gone.

Then Simonides rubbed his wan hands together, and laughed.

"What is the day, daughter?" he said, in the midst of the mood. "What is the day? I wish to remember it for happiness come. See, and look for it laughing, and laughing tell me, Esther."

The merriment seemed unnatural to her; and, as if to entreat him from it, she answered, sorrowfully, "Woe's me, father, that I should ever forget this day!"

His hands fell down the instant, and his chin, dropping upon his breast, lost itself in the muffling folds of flesh composing his lower face.

"True, most true, my daughter!" he said, without looking up. "This is the twentieth day of the fourth month. To-day, five years ago, my Rachel, thy mother, fell down and died. They brought me home broken as thou seest me, and we found her dead of grief. Oh, to me she was a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-Gedi! I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey. We laid her away in a lonely place—in a tomb cut in the mountain; no one near her. Yet in the darkness she left me a little light, which the years have increased to a brightness of morning." He raised his hand and rested it upon his daughter's head. "Dear Lord, I thank thee that now in my Esther my lost Rachel liveth again!"

Directly he lifted his head, and said, as with a sudden thought, "Is it not clear day outside?"

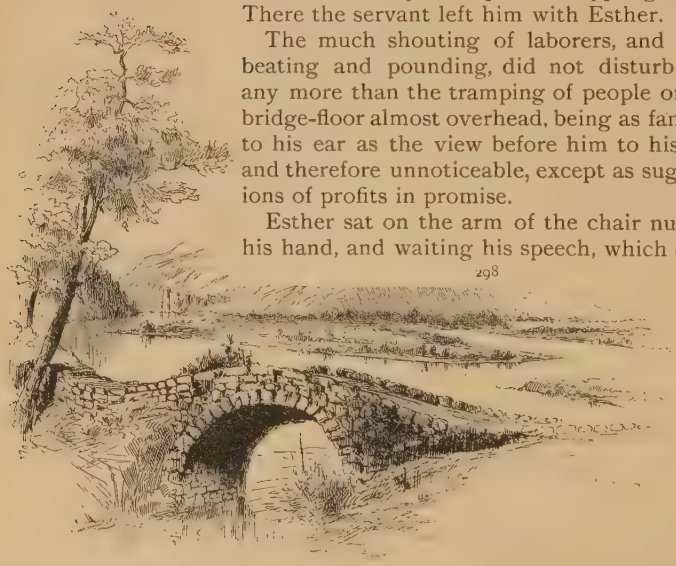
"It was, when the young man came in."

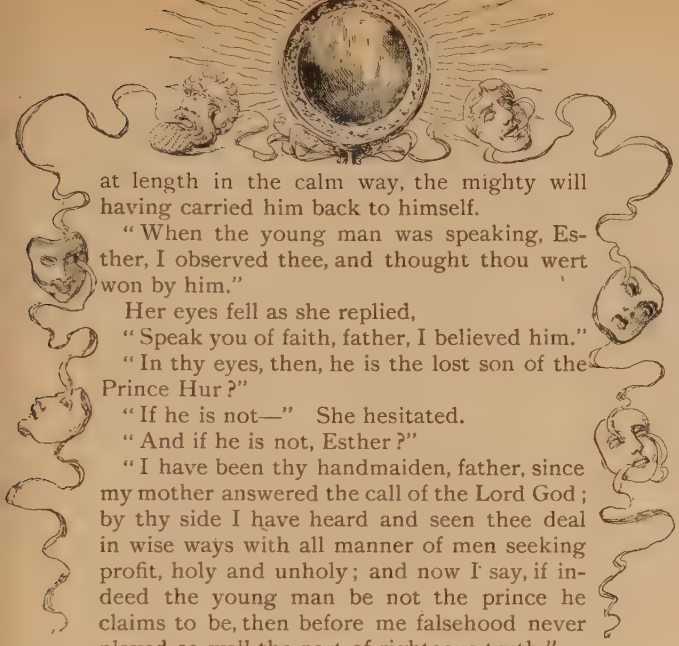
"Then let Abimelech come and take me to the garden, where I can see the river and the ships, and I will tell thee, dear Esther, why but now my mouth filled with laughter, and my tongue with singing, and my spirit was like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices."

In answer to the bell a servant came, and at her bidding pushed the chair, set on little wheels for the purpose, out of the room to the roof of the lower house, called by him his garden. Out through the roses, and by beds of lesser flowers, all triumphs of careful attendance, but now unnoticed, he was rolled to a position from which he could view the palace-tops over against him on the island, the bridge in lessening perspective to the farther shore, and the river below the bridge crowded with vessels, all swimming amidst the dancing splendors of the early sun upon the rippling water. There the servant left him with Esther.

The much shouting of laborers, and their beating and pounding, did not disturb him any more than the tramping of people on the bridge-floor almost overhead, being as familiar to his ear as the view before him to his eye, and therefore unnoticeable, except as suggestions of profits in promise.

Esther sat on the arm of the chair nursing his hand, and waiting his speech, which came





at length in the calm way, the mighty will having carried him back to himself.

"When the young man was speaking, Esther, I observed thee, and thought thou wert won by him."

Her eyes fell as she replied,

"Speak you of faith, father, I believed him."

"In thy eyes, then, he is the lost son of the Prince Hur?"

"If he is not—" She hesitated.

"And if he is not, Esther?"

"I have been thy handmaiden, father, since my mother answered the call of the Lord God; by thy side I have heard and seen thee deal in wise ways with all manner of men seeking profit, holy and unholy; and now I say, if indeed the young man be not the prince he claims to be, then before me falsehood never played so well the part of righteous truth."

"By the glory of Solomon, daughter, thou speakest earnestly. Dost thou believe thy father his father's servant?"

"I understood him to ask of that as something he had but heard."

For a time Simonides' gaze swam among his swimming ships, though they had no place in his mind.

"Well, thou art a good child, Esther, of genuine Jewish shrewdness, and of years and strength to hear a sorrowful tale. Wherefore give me heed, and I will tell you of myself, and of thy mother, and of many things pertaining to the past not in thy knowledge or thy dreams —things withheld from the persecuting Ro-

mans for a hope's sake, and from thee that thy nature should grow towards the Lord straight as the reed to the sun.... I was born in a tomb in the valley of Hinnom, on the south side of Zion. My father and mother were Hebrew bond-servants, tenders of the fig and olive trees growing, with many vines, in the King's Garden hard by Siloam; and in my boyhood I helped them. They were of the class bound to serve forever. They sold me to the Prince Hur, then, next to Herod the King, the richest man in Jerusalem. From the garden he transferred me to his storehouse in Alexandria of Egypt, where I came of age. I served him six years, and in the seventh, by the law of Moses, I went free."

Esther clapped her hands lightly.

"Oh, then, thou art not his father's servant!"

"Nay, daughter, hear. Now, in those days there were lawyers in the cloisters of the Temple who disputed vehemently, saying the children of servants bound forever took the condition of their parents; but the Prince Hur was a man righteous in all things, and an interpreter of the law after the straitest sect, though not of them. He said I was a Hebrew servant bought, in the true meaning of the great law-giver, and, by sealed writings, which I yet have, he set me free."

"And my mother?" Esther asked.

"Thou shalt hear all, Esther; be patient. Before I am through thou shalt see it were easier for me to forget myself than thy mother. ... At the end of my service, I came up to

Jerusalem to the Passover. My master entertained me. I was in love with him already, and I prayed to be continued in his service. He consented, and I served him yet another seven years, but as a hired son of Israel. In his behalf I had charge of ventures on the sea by ships, and of ventures on land by caravans eastward to Susa and Persepolis, and the lands of silk beyond them. Perilous passages were they, my daughter; but the Lord blessed all I undertook. I brought home vast gains for the prince, and richer knowledge for myself, without which I could not have mastered the charges since fallen to me.... One day I was a guest in his house in Jerusalem. A servant entered with some sliced bread on a platter. She came to me first. It was then I saw thy mother, and loved her, and took her away in my secret heart. After a while a time came when I sought the prince to make her my wife. He told me she was bond-servant forever; but if she wished, he would set her free that I might be gratified. She gave me love for love, but was happy where she was, and refused her freedom. I prayed and besought, going again and again after long intervals. She would be my wife, she all the time said, if I would become her fellow in servitude. Our father Jacob served yet other seven years for his Rachel. Could I not as much for mine? But thy mother said I must become as she, to serve forever. I came away, but went back. Look, Esther, look here."

He pulled out the lobe of his left ear.

"See you not the scar of the awl?"

"I see it," she said; "and, oh, I see how thou didst love my mother!"

"Love her, Esther! She was to me more than the Shulamite to the singing king, fairer, more spotless; a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. The master, even as I required him, took me to the judges, and back to his door, and thrust the awl through my ear into the door, and I was his servant forever. So I won my Rachel. And was ever love like mine?"

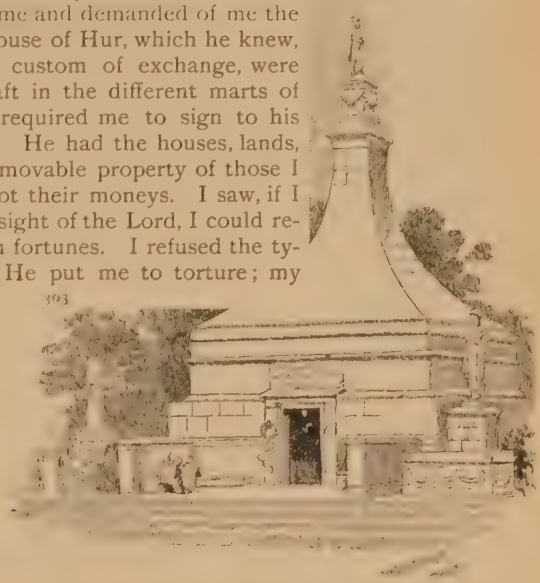
Esther stooped and kissed him, and they were silent, thinking of the dead.

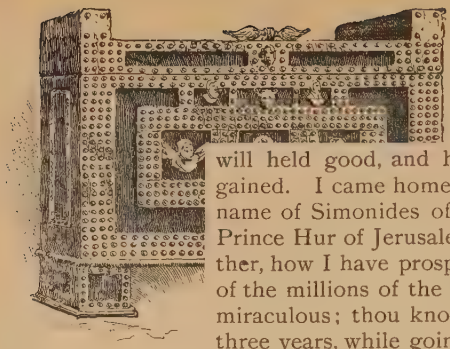
"My master was drowned at sea, the first sorrow that ever fell upon me," the merchant continued. "There was mourning in his house, and in mine here in Antioch, my abiding-place at the time. Now, Esther, mark you! When the good prince was lost, I had risen to be his chief steward, with everything of property belonging to him in my management and control. Judge you how much he loved and trusted me! I hastened to Jerusalem to render account to the widow. She continued me in the stewardship. I applied myself with greater diligence. The business prospered, and grew year by year. Ten years passed; then came the blow which you heard the young man tell about—the accident, as he called it, to the Procurator Gratus. The Roman gave it out an attempt to assassinate him. Under that pretext, by leave from Rome, he confiscated to his own use the immense fortune of the wid-

ow and children. Nor stopped he there. That there might be no reversal of the judgment, he removed all the parties interested. From that dreadful day to this the family of Hur have been lost. The son, whom I had seen as a child, was sentenced to the galleys. The widow and daughter are supposed to have been buried in some of the many dungeons of Judea, which, once closed upon the doomed, are like sepulchres sealed and locked. They passed from the knowledge of men as utterly as if the sea had swallowed them unseen. We could not hear how they died—nay, not even that they were dead."

Esther's eyes were dewy with tears.

"Thy heart is good, Esther, good as thy mother's was; and I pray it have not the fate of most good hearts—to be trampled upon by the unmerciful and blind. But hearken further. I went up to Jerusalem to give help to my benefactress, and was seized at the gate of the city and carried to the sunken cells of the Tower of Antonia; why, I knew not, until Gratus himself came and demanded of me the moneys of the House of Hur, which he knew, after our Jewish custom of exchange, were subject to my draft in the different marts of the world. He required me to sign to his order. I refused. He had the houses, lands, goods, ships, and movable property of those I served; he had not their moneys. I saw, if I kept favor in the sight of the Lord, I could rebuild their broken fortunes. I refused the tyrant's demands. He put me to torture; my





will held good, and he set me free, nothing gained. I came home and began again, in the name of Simonides of Antioch, instead of the Prince Hur of Jerusalem. Thou knowest, Esther, how I have prospered; that the increase of the millions of the prince in my hands was miraculous; thou knowest how, at the end of three years, while going up to Cæsarea, I was taken and a second time tortured by Gratus to compel a confession that my goods and moneys were subject to his order of confiscation; thou knowest he failed as before. Broken in body, I came home and found my Rachel dead of fear and grief for me. The Lord our God reigned, and I lived. From the emperor himself I bought immunity and license to trade throughout the world. To-day — praised be He who maketh the clouds his chariot and walketh upon the winds! — to-day, Esther, that which was in my hands for stewardship is multiplied into talents sufficient to enrich a Cæsar."

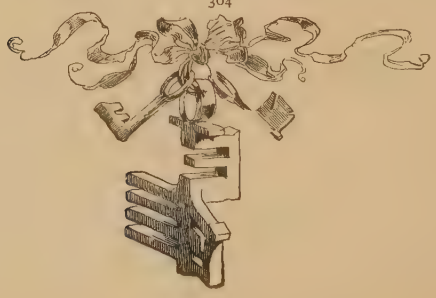
He lifted his head proudly; their eyes met; each read the other's thought. "What shall I with the treasure, Esther?" he asked, without lowering his gaze.

"My father," she answered, in a low voice, "did not the rightful owner call for it but now?"

Still his look did not fail.

"And thou, my child; shall I leave thee a beggar?"

"Nay, father, am not I, because I am thy child, his bond-servant? And of whom was

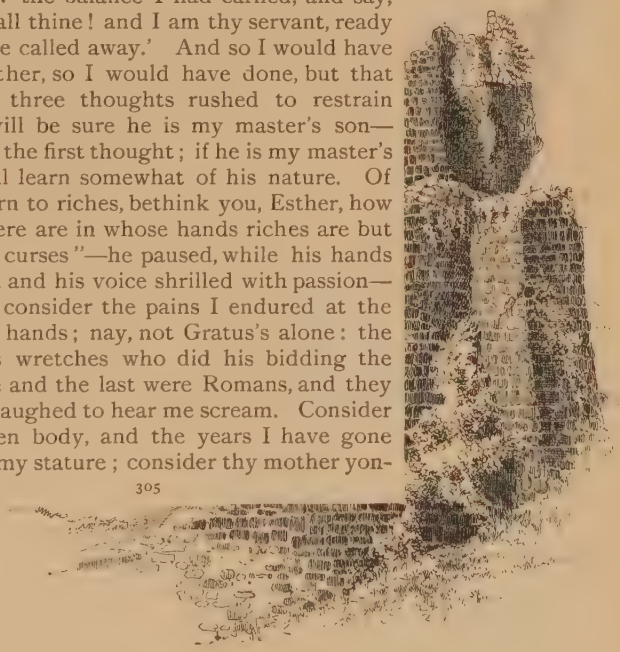


it written, 'Strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come?'"

A gleam of ineffable love lighted his face as he said, "The Lord hath been good to me in many ways; but thou, Esther, art the sovereign excellence of His favor."

He drew her to his breast and kissed her many times.

"Hear now," he said, with clearer voice—"hear now why I laughed this morning. The young man faced me the apparition of his father in comely youth. My spirit arose to salute him. I felt my trial-days were over and my labors ended. Hardly could I keep from crying out. I longed to take him by the hand and show the balance I had earned, and say, 'Lo, 'tis all thine! and I am thy servant, ready now to be called away.' And so I would have done, Esther, so I would have done, but that moment three thoughts rushed to restrain me. I will be sure he is my master's son—such was the first thought; if he is my master's son, I will learn somewhat of his nature. Of those born to riches, bethink you, Esther, how many there are in whose hands riches are but breeding curses"—he paused, while his hands clutched, and his voice shrilled with passion—"Esther, consider the pains I endured at the Roman's hands; nay, not Gratus's alone: the merciless wretches who did his bidding the first time and the last were Romans, and they all alike laughed to hear me scream. Consider my broken body, and the years I have gone shorn of my stature; consider thy mother yon-



der in her lonely tomb, crushed of soul as I of body; consider the sorrows of my master's family if they are living, and the cruelty of their taking-off if they are dead; consider all, and, with Heaven's love about thee, tell me, daughter, shall not a hair fall or a red drop run in expiation? Tell me not, as the preachers sometimes do—tell me not that vengeance is the Lord's. Does He not work His will harmfully as well as in love by agencies? Has He not His men of war more numerous than His prophets? Is not His the law, Eye for eye, hand for hand, foot for foot? Oh, in all these years I have dreamed of vengeance, and prayed and provided for it, and gathered patience from the growing of my store, thinking and promising, as the Lord liveth, it will one day buy me punishment of the wrong-doers! And when, speaking of his practice with arms, the young man said it was for a nameless purpose, I named the purpose even as he spoke—vengeance! and that, Esther, that it was — the third thought which held me still and hard while his pleading lasted, and made me laugh when he was gone."

Esther caressed the faded hands, and said, as if her spirit with his were running forward to results, "He is gone. Will he come again?"

"Aye, Malluch the faithful goes with him, and will bring him back when I am ready."

"And when will that be, father?"

"Not long, not long. He thinks all his witnesses dead. There is one living who will not

fail to know him, if he be, indeed, my master's son."

"His mother?"

"Nay, daughter, I will set the witness before him; till then let us rest the business with the Lord. I am tired. Call Abimelech."

Esther called the servant, and they returned into the house.

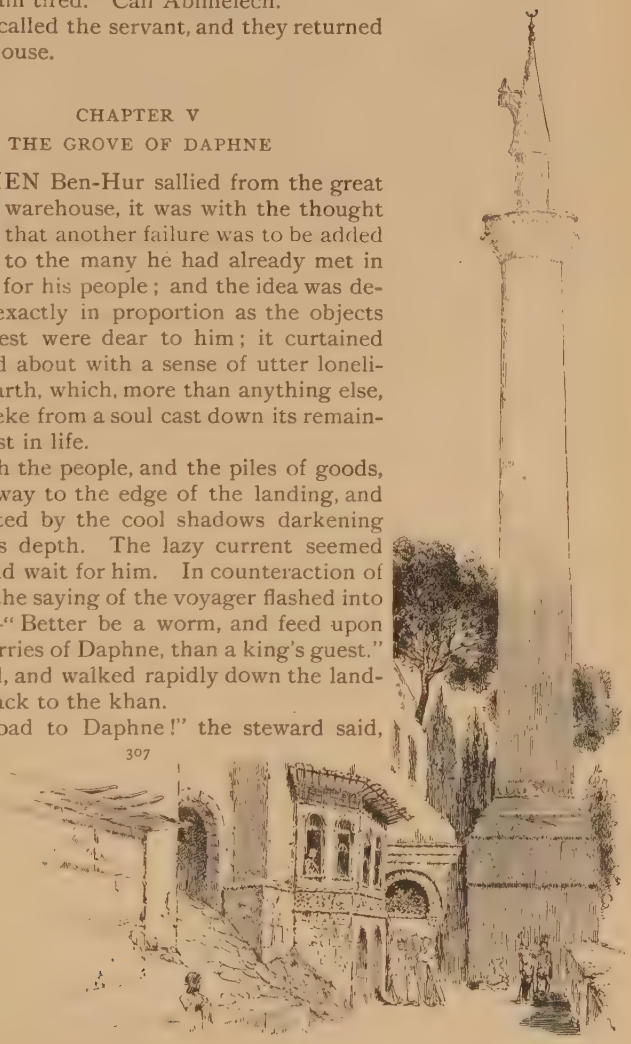
CHAPTER V

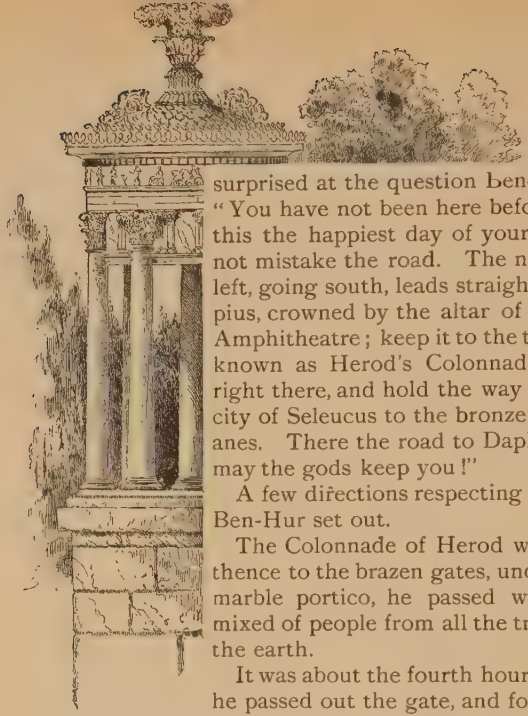
THE GROVE OF DAPHNE

WHEN Ben-Hur sallied from the great warehouse, it was with the thought that another failure was to be added to the many he had already met in the quest for his people; and the idea was depressing exactly in proportion as the objects of his quest were dear to him; it curtained him round about with a sense of utter loneliness on earth, which, more than anything else, serves to eke from a soul cast down its remaining interest in life.

Through the people, and the piles of goods, he made way to the edge of the landing, and was tempted by the cool shadows darkening the river's depth. The lazy current seemed to stop and wait for him. In counteraction of the spell, the saying of the voyager flashed into memory—"Better be a worm, and feed upon the mulberries of Daphne, than a king's guest." He turned, and walked rapidly down the landing and back to the khan.

"The road to Daphne!" the steward said,





surprised at the question Ben-Hur put to him. "You have not been here before? Well, count this the happiest day of your life. You cannot mistake the road. The next street to the left, going south, leads straight to Mount Sulpius, crowned by the altar of Jupiter and the Amphitheatre; keep it to the third cross street, known as Herod's Colonnade; turn to your right there, and hold the way through the old city of Seleucus to the bronze gates of Epiphanes. There the road to Daphne begins—and may the gods keep you!"

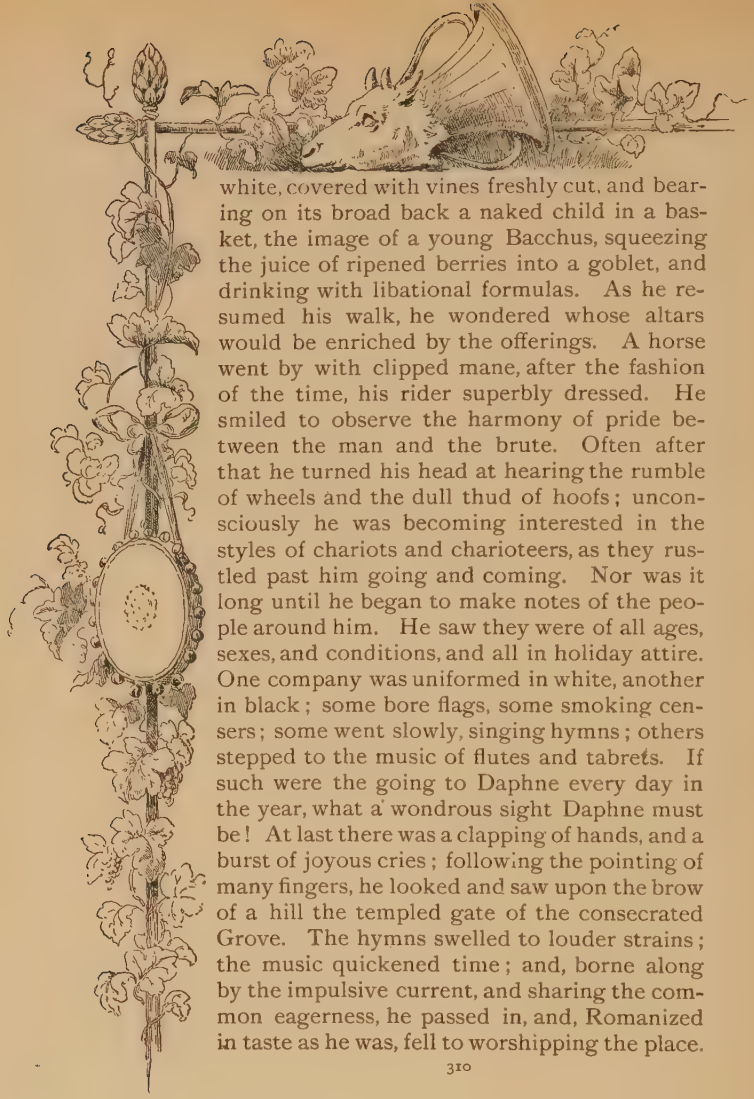
A few directions respecting his baggage, and Ben-Hur set out.

The Colonnade of Herod was easily found; thence to the brazen gates, under a continuous marble portico, he passed with a multitude mixed of people from all the trading nations of the earth.

It was about the fourth hour of the day when he passed out the gate, and found himself one of a procession apparently interminable, moving to the famous Grove. The road was divided into separate ways for footmen, for men on horses, and men in chariots; and those again into separate ways for outgoers and incomers. The lines of division were guarded by low balustrading, broken by massive pedestals, many of which were surmounted with statuary. Right and left of the road extended margins of sward perfectly kept, relieved at intervals by groups of oak and sycamore trees, and vine-clad summer-houses for the accommodation of the weary, of whom, on the re-

turn side, there were always multitudes. The ways of the footmen were paved with red stone, and those of the riders strewn with white sand compactly rolled, but not so solid as to give back an echo to hoof or wheel. The number and variety of fountains at play were amazing, all gifts of visiting kings and called after them. Out south-west to the gates of the Grove, the magnificent thoroughfare stretched a little over four miles from the city.

In his wretchedness of feeling, Ben-Hur barely observed the royal liberality which marked the construction of the road. Nor more did he at first notice the crowd going with him. He treated the processional displays with like indifference. To say truth, besides his self-absorption, he had not a little of the complacency of a Roman visiting the provinces fresh from the ceremonies which daily eddied round and round the golden pillar set up by Augustus as the centre of the world. It was not possible for the provinces to offer anything new or superior. He rather availed himself of every opportunity to push forward through the companies in the way, and too slow-going for his impatience. By the time he reached Heracleia, a suburban village intermediate the city and the Grove, he was somewhat spent with exercise, and began to be susceptible of entertainment. Once a pair of goats led by a beautiful woman, woman and goats alike brilliant with ribbons and flowers, attracted his attention. Then he stopped to look at a bull of mighty girth, and snowy-



white, covered with vines freshly cut, and bearing on its broad back a naked child in a basket, the image of a young Bacchus, squeezing the juice of ripened berries into a goblet, and drinking with libational formulas. As he resumed his walk, he wondered whose altars would be enriched by the offerings. A horse went by with clipped mane, after the fashion of the time, his rider superbly dressed. He smiled to observe the harmony of pride between the man and the brute. Often after that he turned his head at hearing the rumble of wheels and the dull thud of hoofs; unconsciously he was becoming interested in the styles of chariots and charioteers, as they rustled past him going and coming. Nor was it long until he began to make notes of the people around him. He saw they were of all ages, sexes, and conditions, and all in holiday attire. One company was uniformed in white, another in black; some bore flags, some smoking censers; some went slowly, singing hymns; others stepped to the music of flutes and tabrets. If such were the going to Daphne every day in the year, what a wondrous sight Daphne must be! At last there was a clapping of hands, and a burst of joyous cries; following the pointing of many fingers, he looked and saw upon the brow of a hill the templed gate of the consecrated Grove. The hymns swelled to louder strains; the music quickened time; and, borne along by the impulsive current, and sharing the common eagerness, he passed in, and, Romanized in taste as he was, fell to worshipping the place.

Rearward of the structure which graced the entrance-way—a purely Grecian pile—he stood upon a broad esplanade paved with polished stone; around him a restless exclamatory multitude, in gayest colors, relieved against the iridescent spray flying crystal-white from fountains; before him, off to the south-west, dustless paths radiated out into a garden, and beyond that into a forest, over which rested a veil of pale-blue vapor. Ben-Hur gazed wistfully, uncertain where to go. A woman that moment exclaimed,

"Beautiful! But where to now?"

Her companion, wearing a chaplet of bays, laughed and answered, "Go to, thou pretty barbarian! The question implies an earthly fear; and did we not agree to leave all such behind in Antioch with the rusty earth? The winds which blow here are respirations of the gods. Let us give ourselves to waftage of the winds."

"But if we should get lost?"

"O thou timid! No one was ever lost in Daphne, except those on whom her gates close forever."

"And who are they?" she asked, still fearful.

"Such as have yielded to the charms of the place and chosen it for life and death. Hark! Stand we here, and I will show you of whom I speak."

Upon the marble pavement there was a skurry of sandalled feet; the crowd opened, and a party of girls rushed about the speaker and his fair friend, and began singing and dancing

to the tabrets they themselves touched. The woman, scared, clung to the man, who put an arm about her, and, with kindled face, kept time to the music with the other hand overhead. The hair of the dancers floated free, and their limbs blushed through the robes of gauze which scarcely draped them. Words may not be used to tell of the voluptuousness of the dance. One brief round, and they darted off through the yielding crowd lightly as they had come.

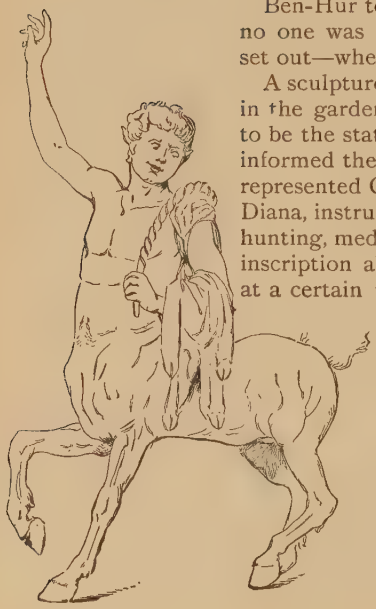
"Now what think you?" cried the man to the woman.

"Who are they?" she asked.

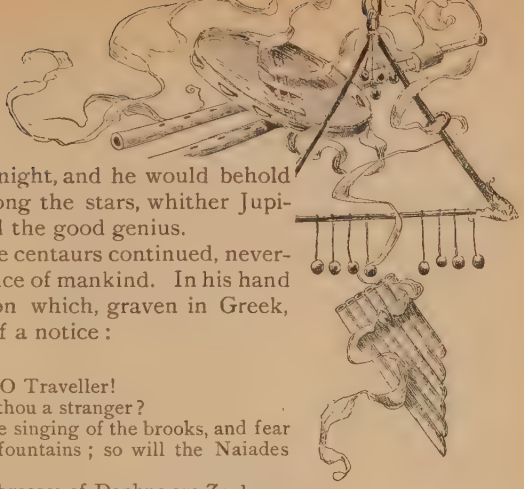
"Devadasi—priestesses devoted to the Temple of Apollo. There is an army of them. They make the chorus in celebrations. This is their home. Sometimes they wander off to other cities, but all they make is brought here to enrich the house of the divine musician. Shall we go now?"

Next minute the two were gone.

Ben-Hur took comfort in the assurance that no one was ever lost in Daphne, and he, too, set out—where, he knew not.



A sculpture reared upon a beautiful pedestal in the garden attracted him first. It proved to be the statue of a centaur. An inscription informed the unlearned visitor that it exactly represented Chiron, the beloved of Apollo and Diana, instructed by them in the mysteries of hunting, medicine, music, and prophecy. The inscription also bade the stranger look out at a certain part of the heavens, at a certain



hour of the clear night, and he would behold the dead alive among the stars, whither Jupiter had transferred the good genius.

The wisest of the centaurs continued, nevertheless, in the service of mankind. In his hand he held a scroll, on which, graven in Greek, were paragraphs of a notice:

"O Traveller!
"Art thou a stranger?

"I. Hearken to the singing of the brooks, and fear not the rain of the fountains; so will the Naiades learn to love thee.

"II. The invited breezes of Daphne are Zephyrus and Auster; gentle ministers of life, they will gather sweets for thee; when Eurus blows, Diana is elsewhere hunting; when Boreas blusters, go hide, for Apollo is angry.

"III. The shades of the Grove are thine in the day; at night they belong to Pan and his Dryades. Disturb them not.

"IV. Eat of the Lotus by the brook-sides sparingly, unless thou wouldst have surcease of memory, which is to become a child of Daphne.

"V. Walk thou round the weaving spider—'tis Arachne at work for Minerva.

"VI. Wouldst thou behold the tears of Daphne, break but a bud from a laurel bough—and die.

"Heed thou!
"And stay and be happy."

Ben-Hur left the interpretation of the mystic notice to others fast enclosing him, and turned away as the white bull was led by. The boy sat in the basket, followed by a procession; after them again, the woman with the goats; and behind her the flute and tabret players, and another procession of gift-bringers.

"Whither go they?" asked a by-stander.

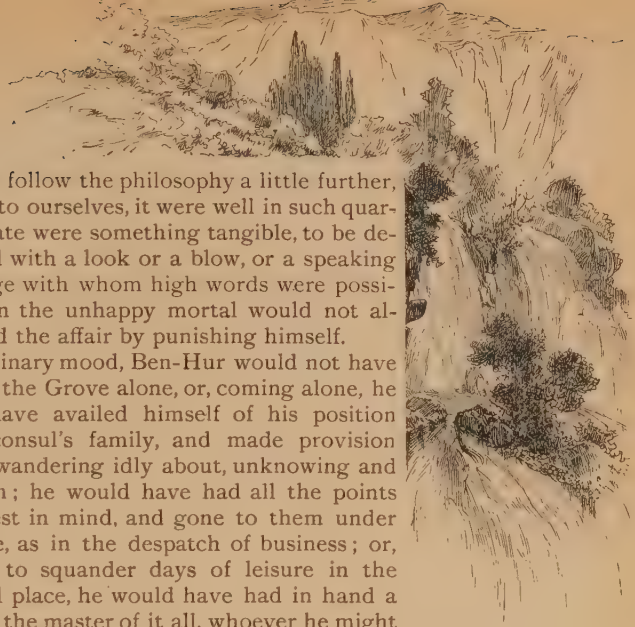
Another made answer, "The bull to Father Jove; the goat—"

"Did not Apollo once keep the flocks of Admetus?"

"Aye, the goat to Apollo!"

The goodness of the reader is again besought in favor of an explanation. A certain facility of accommodation in the matter of religion comes to us after much intercourse with people of a different faith; gradually we attain the truth that every creed is illustrated by good men who are entitled to our respect, but whom we cannot respect without courtesy to their creed. To this point Ben-Hur had arrived. Neither the years in Rome nor those in the galley had made any impression upon his religious faith: he was yet a Jew. In his view, nevertheless, it was not an impiety to look for the beautiful in the Grove of Daphne.

The remark does not interdict the further saying, if his scruples had been ever so extreme, not improbably he would at this time have smothered them. He was angry; not as the irritable, from chafing of a trifle; nor was his anger like the fool's, pumped from the wells of nothing, to be dissipated by a reproach or a curse; it was the wrath peculiar to ardent natures rudely awakened by the sudden annihilation of a hope—dream, if you will—in which the choicest happinesses were thought to be certainly in reach. In such case nothing intermediate will carry off the passion—the quarrel is with Fate.



Let us follow the philosophy a little further, and say to ourselves, it were well in such quarrels if Fate were something tangible, to be despatched with a look or a blow, or a speaking personage with whom high words were possible; then the unhappy mortal would not always end the affair by punishing himself.

In ordinary mood, Ben-Hur would not have come to the Grove alone, or, coming alone, he would have availed himself of his position in the consul's family, and made provision against wandering idly about, unknowing and unknown; he would have had all the points of interest in mind, and gone to them under guidance, as in the despatch of business; or, wishing to squander days of leisure in the beautiful place, he would have had in hand a letter to the master of it all, whoever he might be. This would have made him a sight-seer, like the shouting herd he was accompanying; whereas he had no reverence for the deities of the Grove, nor curiosity; a man in the blindness of bitter disappointment, he was adrift, not waiting for Fate, but seeking it as a desperate challenger.

Every one has known this condition of mind, though, perhaps, not all in the same degree; every one will recognize it as the condition in which he has done brave things with apparent serenity; and every one reading will say, Fortunate for Ben-Hur if the folly which now catches him is but a friendly harlequin with whistle and painted cap, and not some Violence with a pointed sword pitiless.

CHAPTER VI

THE MULBERRIES OF DAPHNE

BEN-HUR entered the woods with the processions. He had not interest enough at first to ask where they were going; yet, to relieve him from absolute indifference, he had a vague impression that they were in movement to the temples, which were the central objects of the Grove, supreme in attractions.

Presently, as singers dreamfully play with a flitting chorus, he began repeating to himself, "Better be a worm, and feed on the mulberries of Daphne, than a king's guest." Then of the much repetition arose questions importunate of answer. Was life in the Grove so very sweet? Wherein was the charm? Did it lie in some tangled depth of philosophy? Or was it something in fact, something on the surface, discernible to every-day wakeful senses? Every year thousands, forswearing the world, gave themselves to service here. Did they find the charm? And was it sufficient, when found, to induce forgetfulness profound enough to shut out of mind the infinitely diverse things of life? those that sweeten and those that imbitter? hopes hovering in the near future as well as sorrows born of the past? If the Grove were so good for them, why should it not be good for him? He was a Jew; could

it be that the excellences were for all the world but children of Abraham? Forthwith he bent all his faculties to the task of discovery, unmindful of the singing of the gift-bringers and the quips of his associates.

In the quest, the sky yielded him nothing; it was blue, very blue, and full of twittering swallows—so was the sky over the city.

Farther on, out of the woods at his right hand, a breeze poured across the road, splashing him with a wave of sweet smells, blended of roses and consuming spices. He stopped, as did others, looking the way the breeze came.

"A garden over there?" he said, to a man at his elbow.

"Rather some priestly ceremony in performance — something to Diana, or Pan, or a deity of the woods."

The answer was in his mother-tongue. Ben-Hur gave the speaker a surprised look.

"A Hebrew?" he asked him.

The man replied, with a deferential smile,

"I was born within a stone's-throw of the market-place in Jerusalem."

Ben-Hur was proceeding to further speech, when the crowd surged forward, thrusting him out on the side of the walk next the woods, and carrying the stranger away. The customary gown and staff, a brown cloth on the head tied by a yellow rope, and a strong Judean face to avouch the garments of honest right, remained in the young man's mind, a kind of summary of the man.

This took place at a point where a path into

the woods began, offering a happy escape from the noisy processions. Ben-Hur availed himself of the offer.

He walked first into a thicket which, from the road, appeared in a state of nature, close, impenetrable, a nesting-place for wild birds. A few steps, however, gave him to see the master's hand even there. The shrubs were flowering or fruit-bearing; under the bending branches the ground was pranked with brightest blooms; over them the jasmine stretched its delicate bonds. From lilac and rose and lily and tulip, from oleander and strawberry-tree, all old friends in the gardens of the valleys about the city of David, the air, lingering or in haste, loaded itself with exhalations day and night; and that nothing might be wanting to the happiness of the nymphs and naiads, down through the flower-lighted shadows of the mass a brook went its course gently, and by many winding ways.

Out of the thicket, as he proceeded, on his right and left, issued the cry of the pigeon and the cooing of turtle-doves; blackbirds waited for him, and bided his coming close; a nightingale kept its place fearless, though he passed in arm's-length; a quail ran before him at his feet, whistling to the brood she was leading, and as he paused for them to get out of his way, a figure crawled from a bed of honeyed musk brilliant with balls of golden blossoms. Ben-Hur was startled. Had he, indeed, been permitted to see a satyr at home? The creature looked up at him, and showed in its teeth

a hooked pruning-knife; he smiled at his own scare, and, lo! the charm was evolved! Peace without fear — peace a universal condition — that it was!

He sat upon the ground beneath a citron-tree, which spread its gray roots sprawling to receive a branch of the brook. The nest of a titmouse hung close to the bubbling water, and the tiny creature looked out of the door of the nest into his eyes. "Verily, the bird is interpreting to me," he thought. "It says, 'I am not afraid of you, for the law of this happy place is Love.'"

The charm of the Grove seemed plain to him; he was glad, and determined to render himself one of the lost in Daphne. In charge of the flowers and shrubs, and watching the growth of all the dumb excellences everywhere to be seen, could not he, like the man with the pruning-knife in his mouth, forego the days of his troubled life—forego them forgetting and forgotten?

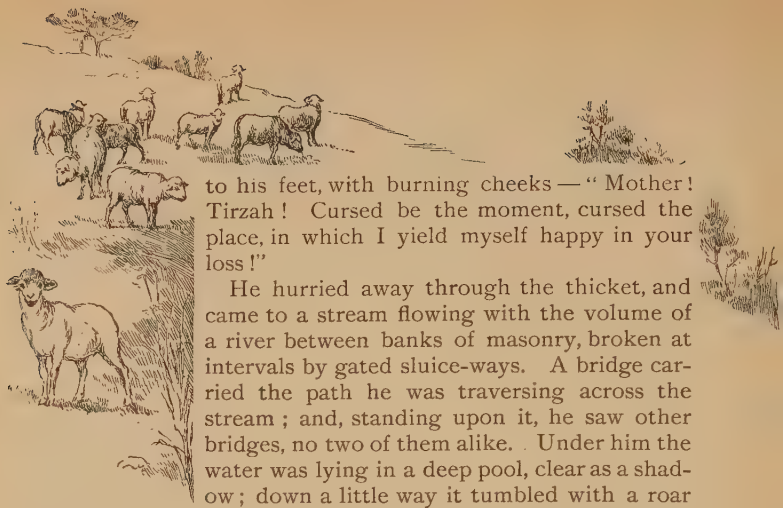
But by-and-by his Jewish nature began to stir within him.

The charm might be sufficient for some people. Of what kind were they?

Love is delightful—ah! how pleasant as a successor to wretchedness like his. But was it all there was of life? All?

There was an unlikeness between him and those who buried themselves contentedly here. They had no duties—they could not have had; but he—

"God of Israel!" he cried aloud, springing



to his feet, with burning cheeks — "Mother! Tirzah! Cursed be the moment, cursed the place, in which I yield myself happy in your loss!"

He hurried away through the thicket, and came to a stream flowing with the volume of a river between banks of masonry, broken at intervals by gated sluice-ways. A bridge carried the path he was traversing across the stream; and, standing upon it, he saw other bridges, no two of them alike. Under him the water was lying in a deep pool, clear as a shadow; down a little way it tumbled with a roar over rocks; then there was another pool, and another cascade; and so on, out of view; and bridges and pools and resounding cascades said, plainly as inarticulate things can tell a story, the river was running by permission of a master, exactly as the master would have it, tractable as became a servant of the gods.

Forward from the bridge he beheld a landscape of wide valleys and irregular heights, with groves and lakes and fanciful houses linked together by white paths and shining streams. The valleys were spread below, that the river might be poured upon them for refreshment in days of drought, and they were as green carpets figured with beds and fields of flowers, and flecked with flocks of sheep white as balls of snow; and the voices of shepherds following the flocks were heard afar. As if to tell him of the pious inscription of all he beheld, the altars out under the open sky seemed countless, each with a white-gowned figure

attending it, while processions in white went slowly hither and thither between them; and the smoke of the altars, half-risen, hung collected in pale clouds over the devoted places.

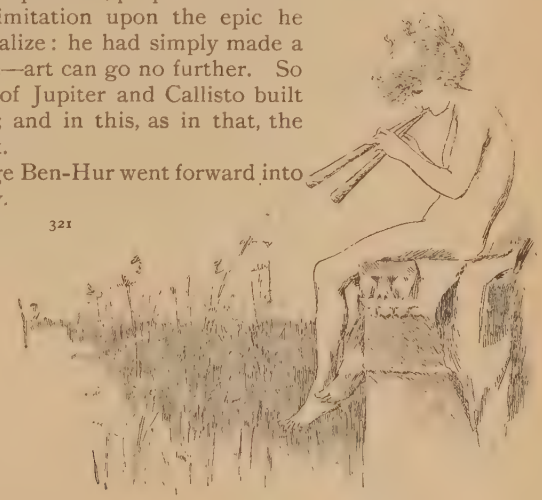
Here, there, happy in flight, intoxicated in pause, from object to object, point to point, now in the meadow, now on the heights, now lingering to penetrate the groves and observe the processions, then lost in efforts to pursue the paths and streams which trended mazily into dim perspectives to end finally in— Ah, what might be a fitting end to scene so beautiful! What adequate mysteries were hidden behind an introduction so marvellous! Here and there, the speech was beginning, his gaze wandered, so he could not help the conviction, forced by the view, and as the sum of it all, that there was peace in the air and on the earth, and invitation everywhere to come and lie down here and be at rest.

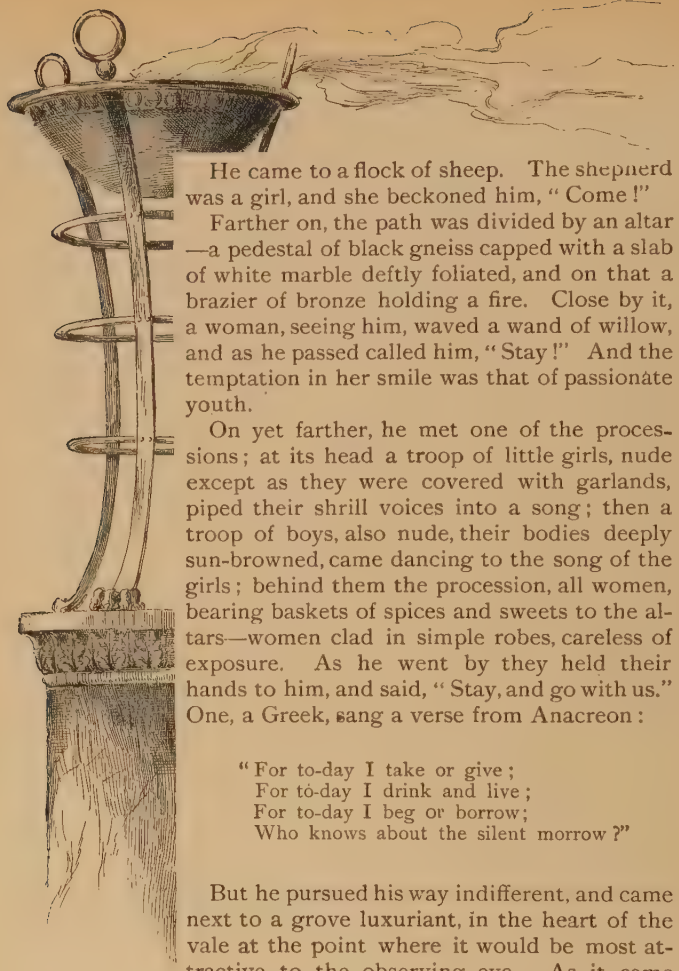
Suddenly a revelation dawned upon him—the Grove was, in fact, a temple—one far-reaching, wall-less temple!

Never anything like it!

The architect had not stopped to pother about columns and porticos, proportions or interiors, or any limitation upon the epic he sought to materialize: he had simply made a servant of Nature—art can go no further. So the cunning son of Jupiter and Callisto built the old Arcadia; and in this, as in that, the genius was Greek.

From the bridge Ben-Hur went forward into the nearest valley.





He came to a flock of sheep. The shepherd was a girl, and she beckoned him, "Come!"

Farther on, the path was divided by an altar—a pedestal of black gneiss capped with a slab of white marble deftly foliated, and on that a brazier of bronze holding a fire. Close by it, a woman, seeing him, waved a wand of willow, and as he passed called him, "Stay!" And the temptation in her smile was that of passionate youth.

On yet farther, he met one of the processions; at its head a troop of little girls, nude except as they were covered with garlands, piped their shrill voices into a song; then a troop of boys, also nude, their bodies deeply sun-browned, came dancing to the song of the girls; behind them the procession, all women, bearing baskets of spices and sweets to the altars—women clad in simple robes, careless of exposure. As he went by they held their hands to him, and said, "Stay, and go with us." One, a Greek, sang a verse from Anacreon:

> "For to-day I take or give;
> For to-day I drink and live;
> For to-day I beg or borrow;
> Who knows about the silent morrow?"

But he pursued his way indifferent, and came next to a grove luxuriant, in the heart of the vale at the point where it would be most attractive to the observing eye. As it came close to the path he was travelling, there was a seduction in its shade, and through the foli-

TOWER OF ANTONIA

age he caught the shining of what appeared a pretentious statue; so he turned aside, and entered the cool retreat.

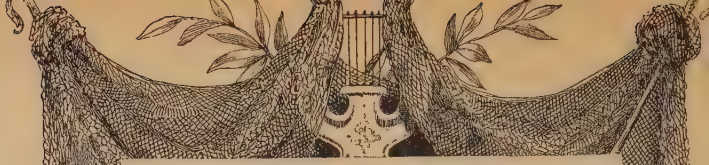
The grass was fresh and clean. The trees did not crowd each other; and they were of every kind native to the East, blended well with strangers adopted from far quarters; here grouped in exclusive companionship palm-trees plumed like queens; there sycamores, overtopping laurels of darker foliage; and evergreen oaks rising verdantly, with cedars vast enough to be kings on Lebanon; and mulberries; and terebinths so beautiful it is not hyperbole to speak of them as blown from the orchards of Paradise.

The statue proved to be a Daphne of wondrous beauty. Hardly, however, had he time to more than glance at her face: at the base of the pedestal a girl and a youth were lying upon a tiger's skin asleep in each other's arms; close by them the implements of their service —his axe and sickle, her basket—flung carelessly upon a heap of fading roses.

The exposure startled him. Back in the hush of the perfumed thicket he discovered, as he thought, that the charm of the great Grove was peace without fear, and almost yielded to it; now, in this sleep in the day's broad glare—this sleep at the feet of Daphne —he read a further chapter to which only the vaguest allusion is sufferable. The law of the place was Love, but Love without Law.

And this was the sweet peace of Daphne!

This the life's end of her ministers!



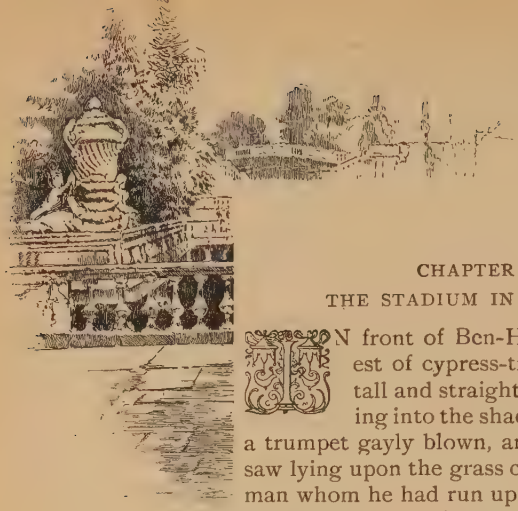
For this kings and princes gave of their revenues!

For this a crafty priesthood subordinated Nature—her birds and brooks and lilies, the river, the labor of many hands, the sanctity of altars, the fertile power of the sun!

It would be pleasant now to record that as Ben-Hur pursued his walk assailed by such reflections, he yielded somewhat to sorrow for the votaries of the great out-door temple; especially for those who, by personal service, kept it in a state so surpassingly lovely. How they came to the condition was not any longer a mystery; the motive, the influence, the inducement, were before him. Some there were, no doubt, caught by the promise held out to their troubled spirits of endless peace in a consecrated abode, to the beauty of which, if they had not money, they could contribute their labor; this class implied intellect peculiarly subject to hope and fear; but the great body of the faithful could not be classed with such. Apollo's nets were wide, and their meshes small; and hardly may one tell what all his fishermen landed: this less for that they cannot be described than because they ought not to be. Enough that the mass were of the sybarites of the world, and of the herds in number vaster and in degree lower—devotees of the unmixed sensualism to which the East was almost wholly given. Not to any of the exaltations—not to the singing-god, or his unhappy mistress; not to any philosophy requiring for its enjoyment the calm of retirement

nor to any service for the comfort there is in religion, nor to love in its holier sense—were they abiding their vows. Good reader, why shall not the truth be told here? Why not learn that, at this age, there were in all earth but two peoples capable of exaltations of the kind referred to—those who lived by the law of Moses, and those who lived by the law of Brahma. They alone could have cried you, Better a law without love than a love without law.

Besides that, sympathy is in great degree a result of the mood we are in at the moment: anger forbids the emotion. On the other hand, it is easiest taken on when we are in a state of most absolute self-satisfaction. Ben-Hur walked with a quicker step, holding his head higher; and, while not less sensitive to the delightfulness of all about him, he made his survey with calmer spirit, though sometimes with curling lip; that is to say, he could not so soon forget how nearly he himself had been imposed upon.



CHAPTER VII

THE STADIUM IN THE GROVE

IN front of Ben-Hur there was a forest of cypress-trees, each a column tall and straight as a mast. Venturing into the shady precinct, he heard a trumpet gayly blown, and an instant after saw lying upon the grass close by the countryman whom he had run upon in the road going to the temples. The man arose, and came to him.

"I give you peace again," he said, pleasantly.

"Thank you," Ben-Hur replied, then asked, "Go you my way?"

"I am for the stadium, if that is your way."

"The stadium!"

"Yes. The trumpet you heard but now was a call for competitors."

"Good friend," said Ben-Hur, frankly, "I admit my ignorance of the Grove; and if you will let me be your follower, I will be glad."

"That will delight me. Hark! I hear the wheels of the chariots. They are taking the track."

Ben-Hur listened a moment, then completed the introduction by laying his hand upon the man's arm, and saying, "I am the son of Arrius, the duumvir, and thou?"

"I am Malluch, a merchant of Antioch."

"Well, good Malluch, the trumpet, and the

gride of wheels, and the prospect of diversion excite me. I have some skill in the exercises. In the palæstræ of Rome I am not unknown. Let us to the course."

Malluch lingered to say, quickly, "The duumvir was a Roman, yet I see his son in the garments of a Jew."

"The noble Arrius was my father by adoption," Ben-Hur answered.

"Ah! I see, and beg pardon."

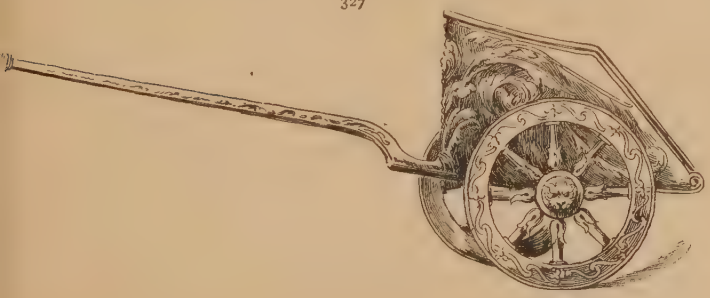
Passing through the belt of forest, they came to a field with a track laid out upon it, in shape and extent exactly like those of the stadia. The course, or track proper, was of soft earth, rolled and sprinkled, and on both sides defined by ropes, stretched loosely upon upright javelins. For the accommodation of spectators, and such as had interests reaching forward of the mere practice, there were several stands shaded by substantial awnings, and provided with seats in rising rows. In one of the stands the two new-comers found places.

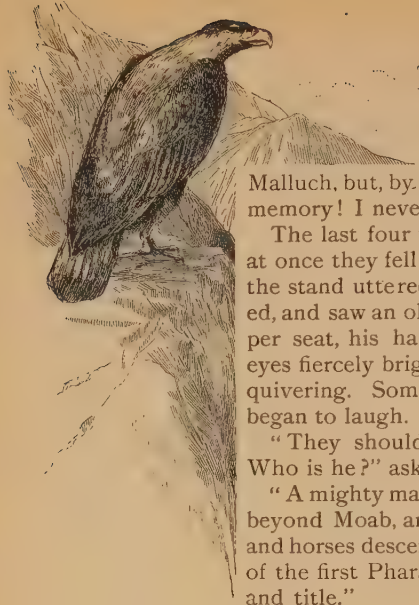
Ben-Hur counted the chariots as they went by—nine in all.

"I commend the fellows," he said, with goodwill. "Here in the East, I thought they aspired to nothing better than the two; but they are ambitious, and play with royal fours. Let us study their performance."

Eight of the fours passed the stand, some walking, others on the trot, and all unexceptionally handled; then the ninth one came on the gallop. Ben-Hur burst into exclamation.

"I have been in the stables of the emperor,





Malluch, but, by our father Abraham of blessed memory! I never saw the like of these."

The last four was then sweeping past. All at once they fell into confusion. Some one on the stand uttered a sharp cry. Ben-Hur turned, and saw an old man half-risen from an upper seat, his hands clinched and raised, his eyes fiercely bright, his long white beard fairly quivering. Some of the spectators nearest him began to laugh.

"They should respect his beard at least. Who is he?" asked Ben-Hur.

"A mighty man from the Desert, somewhere beyond Moab, and owner of camels in herds, and horses descended, they say, from the racers of the first Pharaoh—Sheik Ilderim by name and title."

Thus Malluch replied.

The driver meanwhile exerted himself to quiet the four, but without avail. Each ineffectual effort excited the sheik the more.

"Abaddon seize him!" yelled the patriarch, shrilly. "Run! fly! do you hear, my children?" The question was to his attendants, apparently of the tribe. "Do you hear? They are Desert-born, like yourselves. Catch them—quick!"

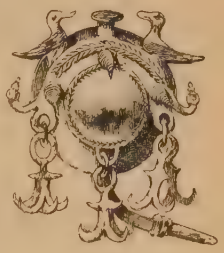
The plunging of the animals increased.

"Accursed Roman!" and the sheik shook his fist at the driver. "Did he not swear he could drive them—swear it by all his brood of bastard Latin gods? Nay, hands off me—off, I say! They should run swift as eagles, and with the temper of hand-bred lambs, he swore. Cursed be he—cursed the mother of liars who

calls him son! See them, the priceless! Let him touch one of them with a lash, and"—the rest of the sentence was lost in a furious grinding of his teeth. "To their heads, some of you, and speak them—a word, one is enough, from the tent-song your mothers sang you. Oh, fool, fool that I was to put trust in a Roman!"

Some of the shrewder of the old man's friends planted themselves between him and the horses. An opportune failure of breath on his part helped the stratagem.

Ben-Hur, thinking he comprehended the sheik, sympathized with him. Far more than mere pride of property—more than anxiety for the result of the race—in his view it was within the possible for the patriarch, according to his habits of thought and his ideas of the inestimable, to love such animals with a tenderness akin to the most sensitive passion.



They were all bright bays, unspotted, perfectly matched, and so proportioned as to seem less than they really were. Delicate ears pointed small heads; the faces were broad and full between the eyes; the nostrils in expansion disclosed membrane so deeply red as to suggest the flashing of flame; the necks were arches, overlaid with fine mane so abundant as to drape the shoulders and breast, while in happy consonance the forelocks were like ravellings of silken veils; between the knees and the fetlocks the legs were flat as an open hand, but above the knees they were rounded with mighty muscles, needful to upbear the shapely close-knit bodies; the hoofs were like cups of

polished agate; and in rearing and plunging they whipped the air, and sometimes the earth, with tails glossy-black and thick and long. The sheik spoke of them as the priceless, and it was a good saying.

In this second and closer look at the horses, Ben-Hur read the story of their relation to their master. They had grown up under his eyes, objects of his special care in the day, his visions of pride in the night, with his family at home in the black tent out on the shadeless bosom of the desert, as his children beloved. That they might win him a triumph over the haughty and hated Roman, the old man had brought his loves to the city, never doubting they would win, if only he could find a trusty expert to take them in hand; not merely one with skill, but of a spirit which their spirits would acknowledge. Unlike the colder people of the West, he could not protest the driver's inability, and dismiss him civilly; an Arab and a sheik, he had to explode, and rive the air about him with clamor.

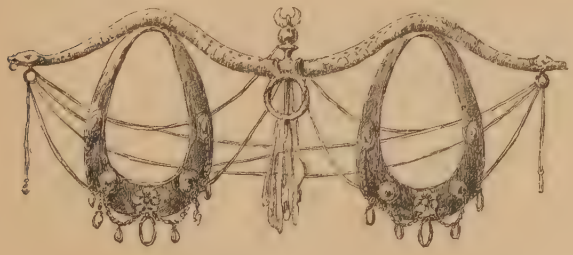
Before the patriarch was done with his expletives, a dozen hands were at the bits of the horses, and their quiet assured. About that time, another chariot appeared upon the track; and, unlike the others, driver, vehicle, and racers were precisely as they would be presented in the Circus the day of final trial. For a reason which will presently be more apparent, it is desirable now to give this turnout plainly to the reader.

There should be no difficulty in understand-

ing the carriage known to us all as the chariot of classical renown. One has but to picture to himself a dray with low wheels and broad axle, surmounted by a box open at the tail-end. Such was the primitive pattern. Artistic genius came along in time, and, touching the rude machine, raised it into a thing of beauty—that, for instance, in which Aurora, riding in advance of the dawn, is given to our fancy.

The jockeys of the ancients, quite as shrewd and ambitious as their successors of the present, called their humblest turnout a two, and their best in grade a four; in the latter, they contested the Olympics and the other festal shows founded in imitation of them.

The same sharp gamesters preferred to put their horses to the chariot all abreast; and for distinction they termed the two next the pole yoke-steeds, and those on the right and left outside trace-mates. It was their judgment, also, that, by allowing the fullest freedom of action, the greatest speed was attainable; accordingly, the harness resorted to was peculiarly simple; in fact, there was nothing of it save a collar round the animal's neck, and a trace fixed to the collar, unless the lines and a halter fall within the term. Wanting to hitch up, the masters pinned a narrow wooden yoke, or cross-tree, near the end of the pole, and, by straps passed through rings at the end of the yoke, buckled the latter to the collar. The traces of the yoke-steeds they hitched to the axle; those of the trace-mates to the top rim of the chariot-bed. There remained then but



the adjustment of the lines, which, judged by the modern devices, was not the least curious part of the method. For this there was a large ring at the forward extremity of the pole; securing the ends to that ring first, they parted the lines so as to give one to each horse, and proceeded to pass them to the driver, slipping them separately through rings on the inner side of the halters at the mouth.

With this plain generalization in mind, all further desirable knowledge upon the subject can be had by following the incidents of the scene occurring.

The other contestants had been received in silence; the last comer was more fortunate. While moving towards the stand from which we are viewing the scene, his progress was signalized by loud demonstrations, by clapping of hands and cheers, the effect of which was to centre attention upon him exclusively. His yoke-steeds, it was observed, were black, while the trace-mates were snow-white. In conformity to the exacting canons of Roman taste, they had all four been mutilated; that is to say, their tails had been clipped, and, to complete the barbarity, their shorn manes were divided into knots tied with flaring red and yellow ribbons.

In advancing, the stranger at length reached a point where the chariot came into view from the stand, and its appearance would of itself have justified the shouting. The wheels were very marvels of construction. Stout bands of burnished bronze reinforced the hubs, other-

wise very light; the spokes were sections of ivory tusks, set in with the natural curve outward to perfect the dishing, considered important then as now; bronze tires held the fellies, which were of shining ebony. The axle, in keeping with the wheels, was tipped with heads of snarling tigers done in brass, and the bed was woven of willow wands gilded with gold.

The coming of the beautiful horses and resplendent chariot drew Ben-Hur to look at the driver with increased interest.

Who was he?

When Ben-Hur asked himself the question first, he could not see the man's face, or even his full figure; yet the air and manner were familiar, and pricked him keenly with a reminder of a period long gone.

Who could it be?

Nearer now, and the horses approaching at a trot. From the shouting and the gorgeousness of the turnout, it was thought he might be some official favorite or famous prince. Such an appearance was not inconsistent with exalted rank. Kings often struggled for the crown of leaves which was the prize of victory. Nero and Commodus, it will be remembered, devoted themselves to the chariot. Ben-Hur arose and forced a passage down nearly to the railing in front of the lower seat of the stand. His face was earnest, his manner eager.

And directly the whole person of the driver was in view. A companion rode with him, in classic description a Myrtilus, permitted men of high estate indulging their passion for the

race-course. Ben-Hur could see only the driver, standing erect in the chariot, with the reins passed several times round his body—a handsome figure, scantily covered by a tunic of light-red cloth; in the right hand a whip; in the other, the arm raised and lightly extended, the four lines. The pose was exceedingly graceful and animated. The cheers and clapping of hands were received with statuesque indifference. Ben-Hur stood transfixed —his instinct and memory had served him faithfully—the driver was Messala.

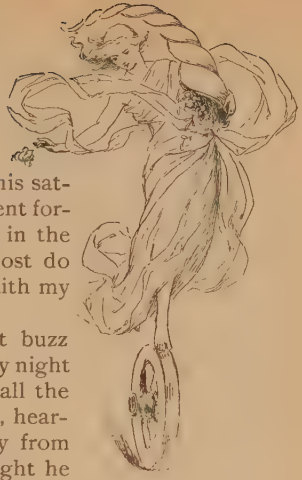
By the selection of horses, the magnificence of the chariot, the attitude, and display of person — above all, by the expression of the cold, sharp, eagle features, imperialized in his countrymen by sway of the world through so many generations, Ben-Hur knew Messala unchanged as haughty, confident, and audacious as ever, the same in ambition, cynicism, and mocking insouciance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOUNTAIN OF CASTALIA

AS Ben-Hur descended the steps of the stand, an Arab arose upon the last one at the foot, and cried out,

"Men of the East and West — hearken! The good Sheik Ilderim giveth greeting. With four horses, sons of the favorites of Solomon the Wise, he hath come up against the best. Needs he most a mighty man to



drive them. Whoso will take them to his satisfaction, to him he promiseth enrichment forever. Here — there — in the city and in the Circuses, and wherever the strong most do congregate, tell ye this his offer. So saith my master, Sheik Ilderim the Generous."

The proclamation awakened a great buzz among the people under the awning. By night it would be repeated and discussed in all the sporting circles of Antioch. Ben-Hur, hearing it, stopped and looked hesitatingly from the herald to the sheik. Malluch thought he was about to accept the offer, but was relieved when he presently turned to him and asked, 'Good Malluch, where to now?"

The worthy replied, with a laugh, "Would you liken yourself to others visiting the Grove for the first time, you will straightway to hear your fortune told."

"My fortune, said you? Though the suggestion has in it a flavor of unbelief, let us to the goddess at once."

"Nay, son of Arrius, these Apollonians have a better trick than that. Instead of speech with a Pythia or a Sibyl, they will sell you a plain papyrus leaf, hardly dry from the stalk, and bid you dip it in the water of a certain fountain, when it will show you a verse in which you may hear of your future."

The glow of interest departed from Ben-Hur's face.

"There are people who have no need to vex themselves about their future," he said, gloomily.

"Then you prefer to go to the temples?"

"The temples are Greek, are they not?"

"They call them Greek."

"The Hellenes were masters of the beautiful in art; but in architecture they sacrificed variety to unbending beauty. Their temples are all alike. How call you the fountain?"

"Castalia."

"Oh! it has repute throughout the world. Let us thither."

Malluch kept watch on his companion as they went, and saw that for the moment, at least, his good spirits were out. To the people passing he gave no attention; over the wonders they came upon there were no exclamations; silently, even sullenly, he kept a slow pace.

The truth was, the sight of Messala had set Ben-Hur to thinking. It seemed scarce an hour ago that the strong hands had torn him from his mother, scarce an hour ago that the Roman had put seal upon the gates of his father's house. He recounted how, in the hopeless misery of the life — if such it might be called—in the galleys, he had had little else to do, aside from labor, than dream dreams of vengeance, in all of which Messala was the principal. There might be, he used to say to himself, escape for Gratus, but for Messala — never! And to strengthen and harden his resolution, he was accustomed to repeat over and over, Who pointed us out to the persecutors? And when I begged him for help— not for myself — who mocked me, and went

away laughing? And always the dream had the same ending. The day I meet him, help me, thou good God of my people!—help me to some fitting special vengeance!

And now the meeting was at hand.

Perhaps, if he had found Messala poor and suffering, Ben-Hur's feeling had been different; but it was not so. He found him more than prosperous; in the prosperity there was a dash and glitter—gleam of sun on gilt of gold.

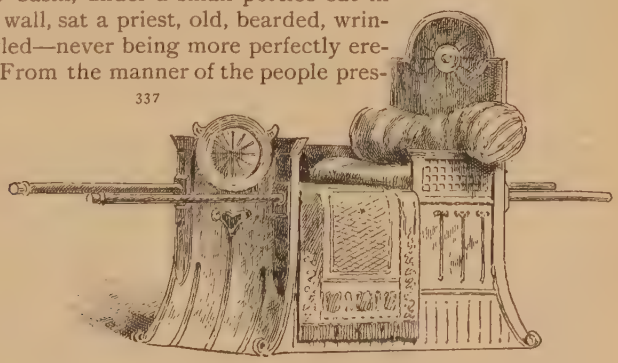
So it happened that what Malluch accounted a passing loss of spirit was pondering when the meeting should be, and in what manner he could make it most memorable.

They turned after a while into an avenue of oaks, where the people were going and coming in groups; footmen here, and horsemen; there women in litters borne by slaves; and now and then chariots rolled by thunderously.

At the end of the avenue the road, by an easy grade, descended into a lowland, where, on the right hand, there was a precipitous facing of gray rock, and on the left an open meadow of vernal freshness. Then they came in view of the famous Fountain of Castalia.

Edging through a company assembled at the point, Ben-Hur beheld a jet of sweet water pouring from the crest of a stone into a basin of black marble, where, after much boiling and foaming, it disappeared as through a funnel.

By the basin, under a small portico cut in the solid wall, sat a priest, old, bearded, wrinkled, cowled—never being more perfectly eremitish. From the manner of the people pres-



ent, hardly might one say which was the attraction, the fountain, forever sparkling, or the priest, forever there. He heard, saw, was seen, but never spoke. Occasionally a visitor extended a hand to him with a coin in it. With a cunning twinkle of the eyes, he took the money, and gave the party in exchange a leaf of papyrus.

The receiver made haste to plunge the papyrus into the basin; then, holding the dripping leaf in the sunlight, he would be rewarded with a versified inscription upon its face; and the fame of the fountain seldom suffered loss by poverty of merit in the poetry. Before Ben-Hur could test the oracle, some other visitors were seen approaching across the meadow, and their appearance piqued the curiosity of the company, his not less than theirs.

He saw first a camel, very tall and very white, in leading of a driver on horseback. A houdah on the animal, besides being unusually large, was of crimson and gold. Two other horsemen followed the camel with tall spears in hand.

"What a wonderful camel!" said one of the company.

"A prince from afar," another one suggested.

"More likely a king."

"If he were on an elephant, I would say he was a king."

A third man had a very different opinion.

"A camel—and a white camel!" he said, authoritatively.

" By Apollo, friends, they who come yonder — you can see there are two of them — are neither kings nor princes; they are women!"

In the midst of the dispute the strangers arrived.

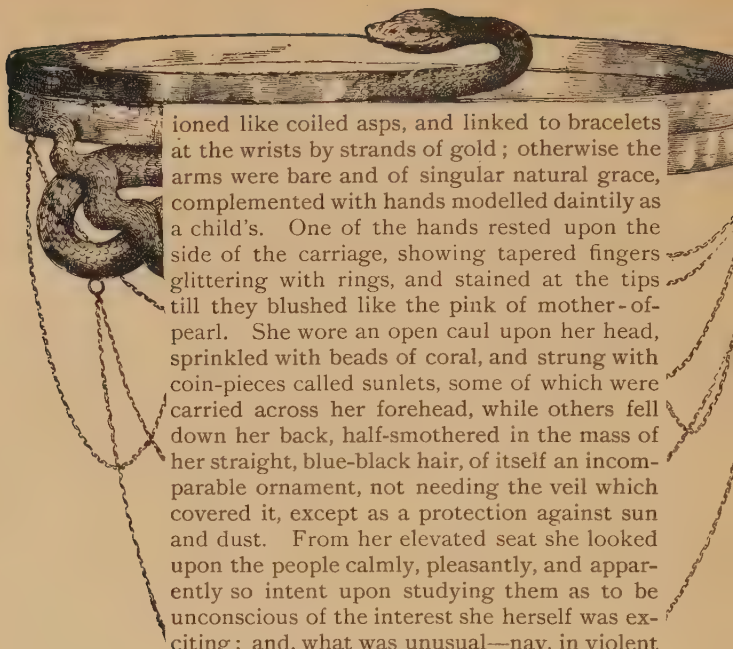
The camel seen at hand did not belie his appearance afar. A taller, statelier brute of his kind no traveller at the fountain, though from the remotest parts, had ever beheld. Such great black eyes! such exceedingly fine white hair! feet so contractile when raised, so soundless in planting, so broad when set!—nobody had ever seen the peer of this camel. And how well he became his housing of silk, and all its frippery of gold in fringe and gold in tassel! The tinkling of silver bells went before him, and he moved lightly, as if unknowing of his burden.

But who were the man and woman under the houdah?

Every eye saluted them with the inquiry.

If the former were a prince or a king, the philosophers of the crowd might not deny the impartiality of Time. When they saw the thin, shrunken face buried under an immense turban, the skin of the hue of a mummy, making it impossible to form an idea of his nationality, they were pleased to think the limit of life was for the great as well as the small. They saw about his person nothing so enviable as the shawl which draped him.

The woman was seated in the manner of the East, amid veils and laces of surpassing fineness. Above her elbows she wore armlets fash-



ioned like coiled asps, and linked to bracelets at the wrists by strands of gold; otherwise the arms were bare and of singular natural grace, complemented with hands modelled daintily as a child's. One of the hands rested upon the side of the carriage, showing tapered fingers glittering with rings, and stained at the tips till they blushed like the pink of mother-of-pearl. She wore an open caul upon her head, sprinkled with beads of coral, and strung with coin-pieces called sunlets, some of which were carried across her forehead, while others fell down her back, half-smothered in the mass of her straight, blue-black hair, of itself an incomparable ornament, not needing the veil which covered it, except as a protection against sun and dust. From her elevated seat she looked upon the people calmly, pleasantly, and apparently so intent upon studying them as to be unconscious of the interest she herself was exciting; and, what was unusual—nay, in violent contravention of the custom among women of rank in public—she looked at them with an open face.

It was a fair face to see; quite youthful; in form, oval; complexion not white, like the Greek; nor brunette, like the Roman; nor blond, like the Gaul; but rather the tinting of the sun of the Upper Nile upon a skin of such transparency that the blood shone through it on cheek and brow with nigh the ruddiness of lamplight. The eyes, naturally large, were touched along the lids with the black paint immemorial throughout the East. The lips

were slightly parted, disclosing, through their scarlet lake, teeth of glistening whiteness. To all these excellences of countenance the reader is finally besought to superadd the air derived from the pose of a small head, classic in shape, set upon a neck long, drooping, and graceful—the air, we may fancy, happily described by the word queenly.

As if satisfied with the survey of people and locality, the fair creature spoke to the driver—an Ethiopian of vast brawn, naked to the waist—who led the camel nearer the fountain, and caused it to kneel; after which he received from her hand a cup, and proceeded to fill it at the basin. That instant the sound of wheels and the trampling of horses in rapid motion broke the silence her beauty had imposed, and, with a great outcry, the by-standers parted in every direction, hurrying to get away.

"The Roman has a mind to ride us down. Look out!" Malluch shouted to Ben-Hur, setting him at the same time an example of hasty flight.

The latter faced to the direction the sounds came from, and beheld Messala in his chariot pushing the four straight at the crowd. This time the view was near and distinct.

The parting of the company uncovered the camel, which might have been more agile than his kind generally; yet the hoofs were almost upon him, and he resting with closed eyes, chewing the endless cud with such sense of security as long favoritism may be supposed to have bred in him. The Ethiopian wrung his

hands afraid. In the houdah, the old man moved to escape; but he was hampered with age, and could not, even in the face of danger, forget the dignity which was plainly his habit. It was too late for the woman to save herself. Ben-Hur stood nearest them, and he called to Messala,

"Hold! Look where thou goest! Back, back!"

The patrician was laughing in hearty good-humor; and, seeing there was but one chance of rescue, Ben-Hur stepped in, and caught the bits of the left yoke-steed and his mate. "Dog of a Roman! Carest thou so little for life?" he cried, putting forth all his strength. The two horses reared, and drew the others round; the tilting of the pole tilted the chariot; Messala barely escaped a fall, while his complacent Myrtilus rolled back like a clod to the ground. Seeing the peril past, all the by-standers burst into derisive laughter.

The matchless audacity of the Roman then manifested itself. Loosing the lines from his body, he tossed them to one side, dismounted, walked round the camel, looked at Ben-Hur, and spoke partly to the old man and partly to the woman.

"Pardon, I pray you — I pray you both. I am Messala," he said; "and, by the old Mother of the earth, I swear I did not see you or your camel! As to these good people — perhaps I trusted too much to my skill. I sought a laugh at them—the laugh is theirs. Good may it do them!"

The good-natured, careless look and gesture he threw the by-standers accorded well with the speech. To hear what more he had to say, they became quiet. Assured of victory over the body of the offended, he signed his companion to take the chariot to a safer distance, and addressed himself boldly to the woman.

"Thou hast interest in the good man here, whose pardon, if not granted now, I shall seek with the greatest diligence hereafter; his daughter, I should say."

She made him no reply.

"By Pallas, thou art beautiful! Beware Apollo mistake thee not for his lost love. I wonder what land can boast herself thy mother. Turn not away. A truce! a truce! There is the sun of India in thine eyes; in the corners of thy mouth, Egypt hath set her love-signs. Perpol! Turn not to that slave, fair mistress, before proving merciful to this one. Tell me, at least, that I am pardoned."

At this point she broke in upon him.

"Wilt thou come here?" she asked, smiling, and with gracious bend of the head to Ben-Hur.

"Take the cup and fill it, I pray thee," she said to the latter. "My father is thirsty."

"I am thy most willing servant!"

Ben-Hur turned about to do the favor, and was face to face with Messala. Their glances met; the Jew's defiant; the Roman's sparkling with humor.

"O stranger, beautiful as cruel!" Messala said, waving his hand to her. "If Apollo get

thee not, thou shalt see me again. Not knowing thy country, I cannot name a god to commend thee to; so, by all the gods, I will commend thee to—myself!"

Seeing the Myrtilus had the four composed and ready, he returned to the chariot. The woman looked after him as he moved away, and whatever else there was in her look, there was no displeasure. Presently she received the water; her father drank; then she raised the cup to her lips, and leaning down, gave it to Ben-Hur; never action more graceful and gracious.

"Keep it, we pray of thee! It is full of blessings—all thine!"

Immediately the camel was aroused, and on his feet, and about to go, when the old man called,

"Stand thou here."

Ben-Hur went to him respectfully.

"Thou hast served the stranger well to-day. There is but one God. In His holy name I thank thee. I am Balthasar, the Egyptian. In the Great Orchard of Palms, beyond the village of Daphne, in the shade of the palms, Sheik Ilderim the Generous abideth in his tents, and we are his guests. Seek us there. Thou shalt have welcome sweet with the savor of the grateful."

Ben-Hur was left in wonder at the old man's clear voice and reverend manner. As he gazed after the two departing, he caught sight of Messala going as he had come, joyous, indifferent, and with a mocking laugh.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHARIOT-RACE DISCUSSED

AS a rule, there is no surer way to the dislike of men than to behave well where they have behaved badly. In this instance, happily, Malluch was an exception to the rule. The affair he had just witnessed raised Ben-Hur in his estimation, since he could not deny him courage and address; could he now get some insight into the young man's history, the results of the day would not be all unprofitable to good master Simonides.

On the latter point, referring to what he had as yet learned, two facts comprehended it all—the subject of his investigation was a Jew, and the adopted son of a famous Roman. Another conclusion which might be of importance was beginning to formulate itself in the shrewd mind of the emissary; between Messala and the son of the duumvir there was a connection of some kind. But what was it?—and how could it be reduced to assurance? With all his sounding, the ways and means of solution were not at call. In the heat of the perplexity, Ben-Hur himself came to his help. He laid his hand on Malluch's arm and drew him out of the crowd, which was already going back to its interest in the gray old priest and the mystic fountain.

"Good Malluch," he said, stopping, "may a man forget his mother?"

The question was abrupt and without direction, and therefore of the kind which leaves the person addressed in a state of confusion. Malluch looked into Ben-Hur's face for a hint of meaning, but saw, instead, two bright-red spots, one on each cheek, and in his eyes traces of what might have been repressed tears; then he answered, mechanically, "No!" adding, with fervor, "never;" and a moment after, when he began to recover himself, "If he is an Israelite, never!" And when at length he was completely recovered—"My first lesson in the synagogue was the Shema; my next was the saying of the son of Sirach, 'Honor thy father with thy whole soul, and forget not the sorrows of thy mother.'"

The red spots on Ben-Hur's face deepened.

"The words bring my childhood back again; and, Malluch, they prove you a genuine Jew. I believe I can trust you."

Ben-Hur let go the arm he was holding, and caught the folds of the gown covering his own breast, and pressed them close, as if to smother a pain, or a feeling there as sharp as a pain.

"My father," he said, "bore a good name, and was not without honor in Jerusalem, where he dwelt. My mother, at his death, was in the prime of womanhood; and it is not enough to say of her she was good and beautiful: in her tongue was the law of kindness, and her works were the praise of all in the gates, and she smiled at days to come. I had a little sister,

and she and I were the family, and we were so happy that I, at least, have never seen harm in the saying of the old rabbi, 'God could not be everywhere, and, therefore, he made mothers.' One day an accident happened to a Roman in authority as he was riding past our house at the head of a cohort; the legionaries burst the gate and rushed in and seized us. I have not seen my mother or sister since. I cannot say they are dead or living. I do not know what became of them. But, Malluch, the man in the chariot yonder was present at the separation; he gave us over to the captors; he heard my mother's prayer for her children, and he laughed when they dragged her away. Hardly may one say which graves deepest in memory, love or hate. To-day I knew him afar—and, Malluch—"

He caught the listener's arm again.

"And, Malluch, he knows and takes with him now the secret I would give my life for: he could tell if she lives, and where she is, and her condition; if she—no, they—much sorrow has made the two as one—if they are dead, he could tell where they died, and of what, and where their bones await my finding."

"And will he not?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I am a Jew, and he is a Roman."

"But Romans have tongues, and Jews, though ever so despised, have methods to beguile them."

"For such as he? No; and, besides, the se-

cret is one of state. All my father's property was confiscated and divided."

Malluch nodded his head slowly, much as to admit the argument; then he asked anew, "Did he not recognize you?"

"He could not. I was sent to death in life, and have been long since accounted of the dead."

"I wonder you did not strike him," said Malluch, yielding to a touch of passion.

"That would have been to put him past serving me forever. I would have had to kill him, and Death, you know, keeps secrets better even than a guilty Roman."

The man who, with so much to avenge, could so calmly put such an opportunity aside must be confident of his future or have ready some better design, and Malluch's interest changed with the thought; it ceased to be that of an emissary in duty bound to another. Ben-Hur was actually asserting a claim upon him for his own sake. In other words, Malluch was preparing to serve him with good heart and from downright admiration.

After brief pause, Ben-Hur resumed speaking.

"I would not take his life, good Malluch; against that extreme the possession of the secret is for the present, at least, his safeguard; yet I may punish him, and so you give me help, I will try."

"He is a Roman," said Malluch, without hesitation; "and I am of the tribe of Judah. I will help you. If you choose, put me under oath — under the most solemn oath."

"Give me your hand, that will suffice."

As their hands fell apart, Ben-Hur said, with lightened feeling, "That I would charge you with is not difficult, good friend; neither is it dreadful to conscience. Let us move on."

They took the road which led to the right across the meadow spoken of in the description of the coming to the fountain. Ben-Hur was the first to break the silence.

"Do you know Sheik Ilderim the Generous?"

"Yes."

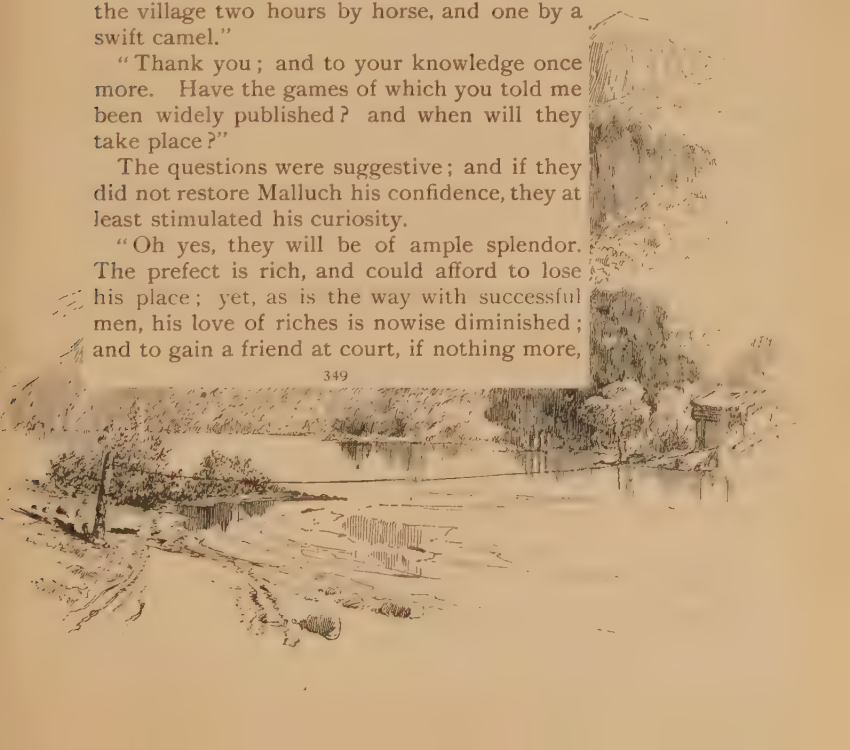
"Where is his Orchard of Palms? or, rather, Malluch, how far is it beyond the village of Daphne?"

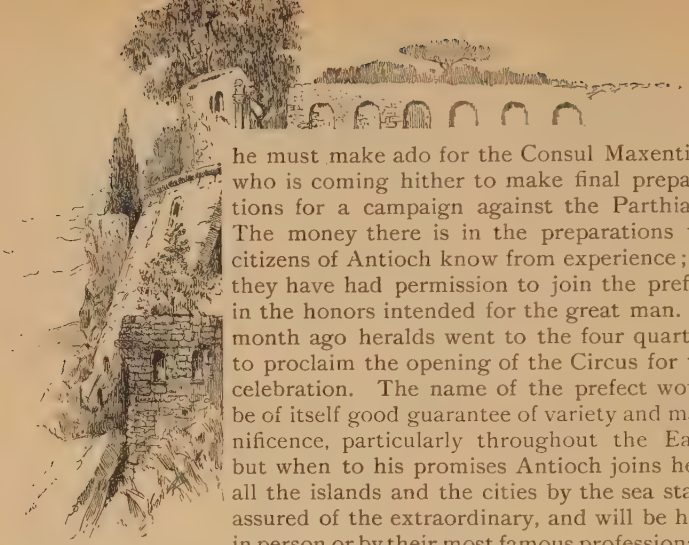
Malluch was touched by a doubt; he recalled the prettiness of the favor shown him by the woman at the fountain, and wondered if he who had the sorrows of a mother in mind was about to forget them for a lure of love; yet he replied, "The Orchard of Palms lies beyond the village two hours by horse, and one by a swift camel."

"Thank you; and to your knowledge once more. Have the games of which you told me been widely published? and when will they take place?"

The questions were suggestive; and if they did not restore Malluch his confidence, they at least stimulated his curiosity.

"Oh yes, they will be of ample splendor. The prefect is rich, and could afford to lose his place; yet, as is the way with successful men, his love of riches is nowise diminished; and to gain a friend at court, if nothing more,





he must make ado for the Consul Maxentius, who is coming hither to make final preparations for a campaign against the Parthians. The money there is in the preparations the citizens of Antioch know from experience; so they have had permission to join the prefect in the honors intended for the great man. A month ago heralds went to the four quarters to proclaim the opening of the Circus for the celebration. The name of the prefect would be of itself good guarantee of variety and magnificence, particularly throughout the East; but when to his promises Antioch joins hers, all the islands and the cities by the sea stand assured of the extraordinary, and will be here in person or by their most famous professionals. The fees offered are royal."

"And the Circus—I have heard it is second only to the Maximus."

"At Rome, you mean. Well, ours seats two hundred thousand people, yours seats seventy-five thousand more; yours is of marble, so is ours; in arrangement they are exactly the same."

"Are the rules the same?"

Malluch smiled.

"If Antioch dared be original, son of Arrius, Rome would not be the mistress she is. The laws of the Circus Maximus govern except in one particular: there but four chariots may start at once, here all start without reference to number."

"That is the practice of the Greeks," said Ben-Hur.

"Yes, Antioch is more Greek than Roman."

"So then, Malluch, I may choose my own chariot?"

"Your own chariot and horses. There is no restriction upon either."

While replying, Malluch observed the thoughtful look on Ben-Hur's face give place to one of satisfaction.

"One thing more now, O Malluch. When will the celebration be?"

"Ah! your pardon," the other answered. "To-morrow — and the next day," he said, counting aloud, "then, to speak in the Roman style, if the sea-gods be propitious, the consul arrives. Yes, the sixth day from this we have the games."

"The time is short, Malluch, but it is enough." The last words were spoken decisively. "By the prophets of our old Israel! I will take to the reins again. Stay! a condition; is there assurance that Messala will be a competitor?"

Malluch saw now the plan, and all its opportunities for the humiliation of the Roman; and he had not been true descendant of Jacob if, with all his interest wakened, he had not rushed to a consideration of the chances. His voice actually trembled as he said, "Have you the practice?"

"Fear not, my friend. The winners in the Circus Maximus have held their crowns these three years at my will. Ask them—ask the best of them—and they will tell you so. In the last great games the emperor himself offered

me his patronage if I would take his horses in hand and run them against the entries of the world."

"But you did not?"

Malluch spoke eagerly.

"I—I am a Jew"—Ben-Hur seemed shrinking within himself as he spoke—"and, though I wear a Roman name, I dared not do professionally a thing to sully my father's name in the cloisters and courts of the Temple. In the palæstræ I could indulge practice which, if followed into the Circus, would become an abomination; and if I take to the course here, Malluch, I swear it will not be for the prize or the winner's fee."

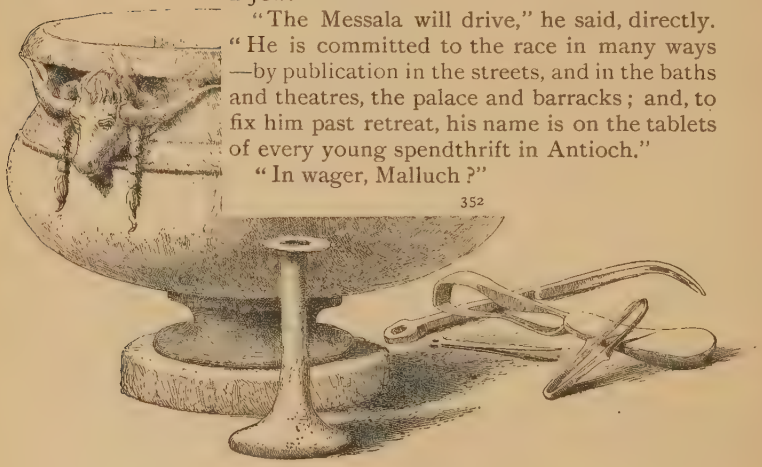
"Hold — swear not so!" cried Malluch. "The fee is ten thousand sestertii—a fortune for life!"

"Not for me, though the prefect trebled it fifty times. Better than that, better than all the imperial revenues from the first year of the first Cæsar—I will make this race to humble my enemy. Vengeance is permitted by the law."

Malluch smiled and nodded as if saying, "Right, right—trust me a Jew to understand a Jew."

"The Messala will drive," he said, directly. "He is committed to the race in many ways —by publication in the streets, and in the baths and theatres, the palace and barracks; and, to fix him past retreat, his name is on the tablets of every young spendthrift in Antioch."

"In wager, Malluch?"



"Yes, in wager; and every day he comes ostentatiously to practise, as you saw him."

'Ah! and that is the chariot, and those the horses, with which he will make the race? Thank you, thank you, Malluch! You have served me well already. I am satisfied. Now be my guide to the Orchard of Palms, and give me introduction to Sheik Ilderim the Generous."

"When?"

"To-day. His horses may be engaged to-morrow."

"You like them, then?"

Ben-Hur answered with animation,

"I saw them from the stand an instant only, for Messala then drove up, and I might not look at anything else; yet I recognized them as of the blood which is the wonder as well as the glory of the deserts. I never saw the kind before, except in the stables of Cæsar; but once seen, they are always to be known. To-morrow, upon meeting, I will know you, Malluch, though you do not so much as salute me; I will know you by your face, by your form, by your manner; and by the same signs I will know them, and with the same certainty. If all that is said of them be true, and I can bring their spirit under control of mine, I can—"

"Win the sestertii!" said Malluch, laughing.

"No," answered Ben-Hur, as quickly. "I will do what better becomes a man born to the heritage of Jacob—I will humble mine enemy in a most public place. But," he added, im-

patiently, "we are losing time. How can we most quickly reach the tents of the sheik?"

Malluch took a moment for reflection.

"It is best we go straight to the village, which is fortunately near by; if two swift camels are to be had for hire there, we will be on the road but an hour."

"Let us about it, then."

The village was an assemblage of palaces in beautiful gardens, interspersed with khans of princely sort. Dromedaries were happily secured, and upon them the journey to the famous Orchard of Palms was begun.

CHAPTER X

BEN-HUR HEARS OF CHRIST

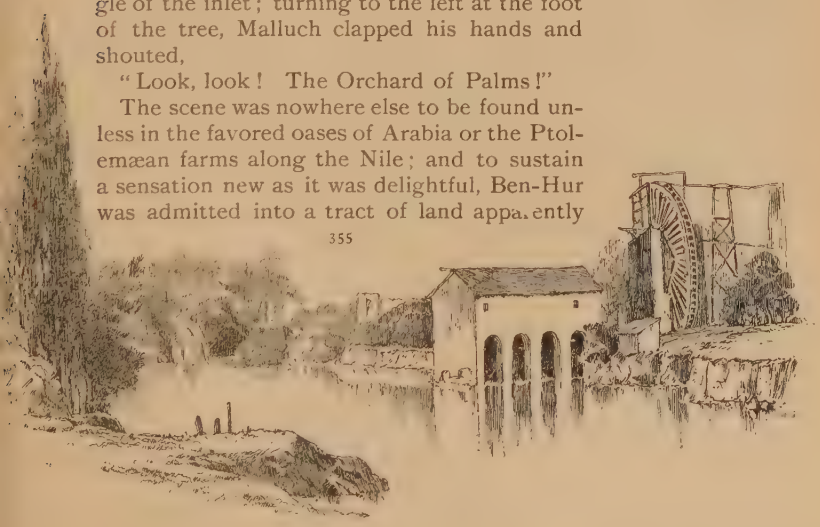
BEYOND the village the country was undulating and cultivated; in fact, it was the garden-land of Antioch, with not a foot lost to labor. The steep faces of the hills were terraced; even the hedges were brighter of the trailing vines which, besides the lure of shade, offered passers-by sweet promises of wine to come, and grapes in clustered purple ripeness. Over melon-patches, and through apricot and fig-tree groves, and groves of oranges and limes, the whitewashed houses of the farmers were seen; and everywhere Plenty, the smiling daughter of Peace, gave notice by her thousand signs that she was at home, making the generous traveller merry at heart, until he was even disposed to give

Rome her dues. Occasionally, also, views were had of Taurus and Lebanon, between which, a separating line of silver, the Orontes placidly pursued its way.

In course of their journey the friends came to the river, which they followed with the windings of the road, now over bold bluffs, and then into vales, all alike allotted for country-seats; and if the land was in full foliage of oak and sycamore and myrtle, and bay and arbutus, and perfuming jasmine, the river was bright with slanted sunlight, which would have slept where it fell but for ships in endless procession, gliding with the current, tacking for the wind, or bounding under the impulse of oars—some coming, some going, and all suggestive of the sea, and distant peoples, and famous places, and things coveted on account of their rarity. To the fancy there is nothing so winsome as a white sail seaward blown, unless it be a white sail homeward bound, its voyage happily done. And down the shores the friends went continuously till they came to a lake fed by backwater from the river, clear, deep, and without current. An old palm-tree dominated the angle of the inlet; turning to the left at the foot of the tree, Malluch clapped his hands and shouted,

"Look, look! The Orchard of Palms!"

The scene was nowhere else to be found unless in the favored oases of Arabia or the Ptolemæan farms along the Nile; and to sustain a sensation new as it was delightful, Ben-Hur was admitted into a tract of land appa. ently



without limit and level as a floor. All under foot was fresh grass, in Syria the rarest and most beautiful production of the soil; if he looked up, it was to see the sky palely blue through the groinery of countless date-bearers, very patriarchs of their kind, so numerous and old, and of such mighty girth, so tall, so serried, so wide of branch, each branch so perfect with fronds, plumy and waxlike and brilliant, they seemed enchanters enchanted. Here was the grass coloring the very atmosphere; there the lake, cool and clear, rippling but a few feet under the surface, and helping the trees to their long life in old age. Did the Grove of Daphne excel this one? And the palms, as if they knew Ben-Hur's thought, and would win him after a way of their own, seemed, as he passed under their arches, to stir and sprinkle him with dewy coolness.

The road wound in close parallelism with the shore of the lake; and when it carried the travellers down to the water's edge, there was always on that side a shining expanse limited not far off by the opposite shore, on which, as on this one, no tree but the palm was permitted.

"See that," said Malluch, pointing to a giant of the place. "Each ring upon its trunk marks a year of its life. Count them from root to branch, and if the sheik tells you the grove was planted before the Seleucidæ were heard of in Antioch, do not doubt him."

One may not look at a perfect palm-tree but that, with a subtlety all its own, it assumes a presence for itself, and makes a poet of the be-

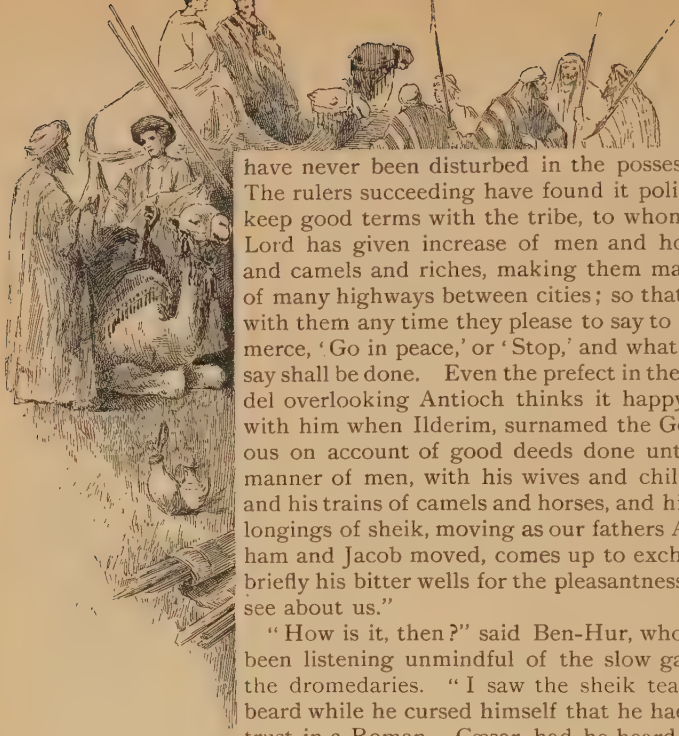
holder. This is the explanation of the honors it has received, beginning with the artists of the first kings, who could find no form in all the earth to serve them so well as a model for the pillars of their palaces and temples; and for the same reason Ben-Hur was moved to say,

"As I saw him at the stand to-day, good Malluch, Sheik Ilderim appeared to be a very common man. The rabbis in Jerusalem would look down upon him, I fear, as a son of a dog of Edom. How came he in possession of the Orchard? And how has he been able to hold it against the greed of Roman governors?"

"If blood derives excellence from time, son of Arrius, then is old Ilderim a man, though he be an uncircumcised Edomite."

Malluch spoke warmly.

"All his fathers before him were sheiks. One of them—I shall not say when he lived or did the good deed—once helped a king who was being hunted with swords. The story says he loaned him a thousand horsemen, who knew the paths of the wilderness and its hiding-places as shepherds know the scant hills they inhabit with their flocks; and they carried him here and there until the opportunity came, and then with their spears they slew the enemy, and set him upon his throne again. And the king, it is said, remembered the service, and brought the son of the Desert to this place, and bade him set up his tent and bring his family and his herds, for the lake and trees, and all the land from the river to the nearest mountains, were his and his children's forever. And they



have never been disturbed in the possession. The rulers succeeding have found it policy to keep good terms with the tribe, to whom the Lord has given increase of men and horses, and camels and riches, making them masters of many highways between cities; so that it is with them any time they please to say to commerce, 'Go in peace,' or 'Stop,' and what they say shall be done. Even the prefect in the citadel overlooking Antioch thinks it happy day with him when Ilderim, surnamed the Generous on account of good deeds done unto all manner of men, with his wives and children, and his trains of camels and horses, and his belongings of sheik, moving as our fathers Abraham and Jacob moved, comes up to exchange briefly his bitter wells for the pleasantness you see about us."

"How is it, then?" said Ben-Hur, who had been listening unmindful of the slow gait of the dromedaries. "I saw the sheik tear his beard while he cursed himself that he had put trust in a Roman. Cæsar, had he heard him, might have said, 'I like not such a friend as this; put him away.'"

"It would be but shrewd judgment," Malluch replied, smiling. "Ilderim is not a lover of Rome; he has a grievance. Three years ago the Parthians rode across the road from Bozra to Damascus, and fell upon a caravan laden, among other things, with the incoming tax-returns of a district over that way. They slew every creature taken, which the censors in Rome could have forgiven if the imperial

treasure had been spared and forwarded. The farmers of the taxes, being chargeable with the loss, complained to Cæsar, and Cæsar held Herod to payment, and Herod, on his part, seized property of Ilderim, whom he charged with treasonable neglect of duty. The sheik appealed to Cæsar, and Cæsar has made him such answer as might be looked for from the unwinking sphinx. The old man's heart has been aching sore ever since, and he nurses his wrath, and takes pleasure in its daily growth."

"He can do nothing, Malluch."

"Well," said Malluch, "that involves another explanation, which I will give you, if we can draw nearer. But see!—the hospitality of the sheik begins early—the children are speaking to you."

The dromedaries stopped, and Ben-Hur looked down upon some little girls of the Syrian peasant class, who were offering him their baskets filled with dates. The fruit was freshly gathered, and not to be refused; he stooped and took it, and as he did so a man in the tree by which they were halted cried, "Peace to you, and welcome!"

Their thanks said to the children, the friends moved on at such gait as the animals chose.

"You must know," Malluch continued, pausing now and then to dispose of a date, "that the merchant Simonides gives me his confidence, and sometimes flatters me by taking me into counsel; and as I attend him at his house, I have made acquaintance with many of his friends, who, knowing my footing with the host,

talk to him freely in my presence. In that way I became somewhat intimate with Sheik Ilderim."

For a moment Ben-Hur's attention wandered. Before his mind's eye there arose the image, pure, gentle, and appealing, of Esther, the merchant's daughter. Her dark eyes bright with the peculiar Jewish lustre met his in modest gaze; he heard her step as when she approached him with the wine, and her voice as she tendered him the cup; and he acknowledged to himself again all the sympathy she manifested for him, and manifested so plainly that words were unnecessary, and so sweetly that words would have been but a detraction. The vision was exceeding pleasant, but upon his turning to Malluch, it flew away.

"A few weeks ago," said Malluch, continuing, "the old Arab called on Simonides, and found me present. I observed he seemed much moved about something, and, in deference, offered to withdraw, but he himself forbade me. 'As you are an Israelite,' he said, 'stay, for I have a strange story to tell.' The emphasis on the word Israelite excited my curiosity. I remained, and this is in substance his story—I cut it short because we are drawing nigh the tent, and I leave the details to the good man himself. A good many years ago, three men called at Ilderim's tent, out in the wilderness. They were all foreigners, a Hindoo, a Greek, and an Egyptian; and they had come on camels, the largest he had ever seen, and all white. He welcomed them, and gave

them rest. Next morning they arose and prayed a prayer new to the sheik—a prayer addressed to God and his son—this with much mystery besides. After breaking fast with him, the Egyptian told who they were, and whence they had come. Each had seen a star, out of which a voice had bidden them go to Jerusalem and ask, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' They obeyed. From Jerusalem they were led by a star to Bethlehem, where, in a cave, they found a child newly born, which they fell down and worshipped; and after worshipping it, and giving it costly presents, and bearing witness of what it was, they took to their camels, and fled without pause to the sheik, because if Herod—meaning him surnamed the Great—could lay hands upon them, he would certainly kill them. And, faithful to his habit, the sheik took care of them, and kept them concealed for a year, when they departed, leaving with him gifts of great value, and each going a separate way."

"It is, indeed, a most wonderful story," Ben-Hur exclaimed at its conclusion. "What did you say they were to ask at Jerusalem?"

"They were to ask, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?'"

"Was that all?"

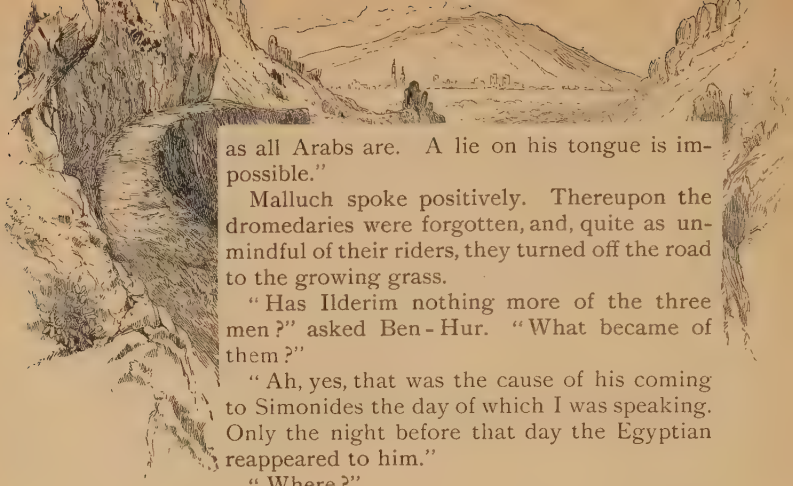
"There was more to the question, but I cannot recall it."

"And they found the child?"

"Yes, and worshipped him."

"It is a miracle, Malluch."

"Ilderim is a grave man, though excitable,



as all Arabs are. A lie on his tongue is impossible."

Malluch spoke positively. Thereupon the dromedaries were forgotten, and, quite as unmindful of their riders, they turned off the road to the growing grass.

"Has Ilderim nothing more of the three men?" asked Ben-Hur. "What became of them?"

"Ah, yes, that was the cause of his coming to Simonides the day of which I was speaking. Only the night before that day the Egyptian reappeared to him."

"Where?"

"Here at the door of the tent to which we are coming."

"How knew he the man?"

"As you knew the horses to-day—by face and manner."

"By nothing else?"

"He rode the same great white camel, and gave him the same name—Balthasar, the Egyptian."

"It is a wonder of the Lord's!"

Ben-Hur spoke with excitement.

And Malluch, wondering, asked "Why so?"

"Balthasar, you said?"

"Yes. Balthasar, the Egyptian."

"That was the name the old man gave us at the fountain to-day."

Then, at the reminder, Malluch became excited.

"It is true," he said; "and the camel was the same—and you saved the man's life."

"And the woman," said Ben-Hur, like one speaking to himself—"the woman was his daughter."

He fell to thinking; and even the reader will say he was having a vision of the woman, and that it was more welcome than that of Esther, if only because it stayed longer with him; but no—

"Tell me again," he said, presently. "Were the three to ask, 'Where is he that is to be King of the Jews?'"

"Not exactly. The words were 'born to be King of the Jews.' Those were the words as the old sheik caught them first in the desert, and he has ever since been waiting the coming of the king; nor can any one shake his faith that he will come."

"How—as king?"

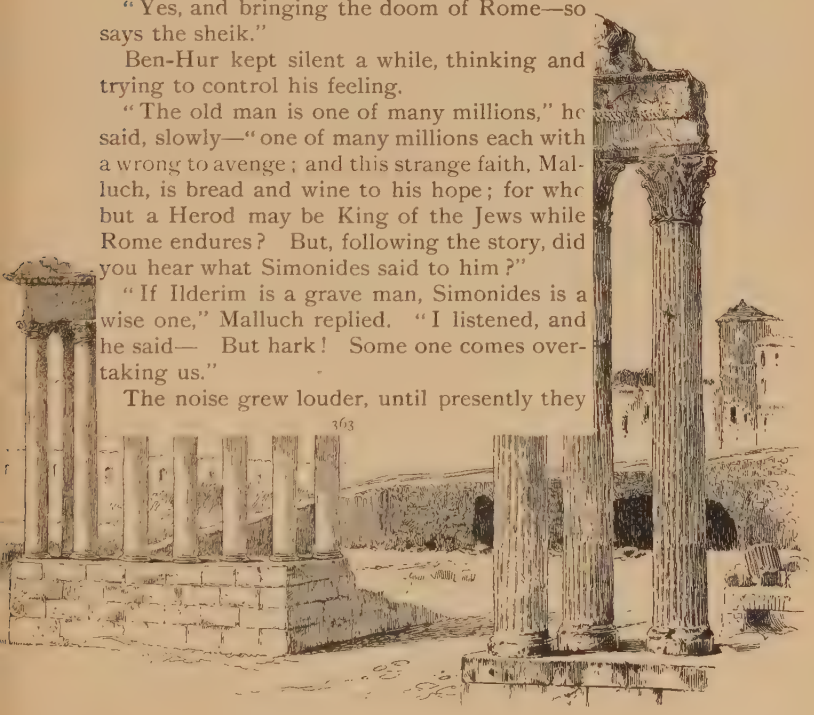
"Yes, and bringing the doom of Rome—so says the sheik."

Ben-Hur kept silent a while, thinking and trying to control his feeling.

"The old man is one of many millions," he said, slowly—"one of many millions each with a wrong to avenge; and this strange faith, Malluch, is bread and wine to his hope; for who but a Herod may be King of the Jews while Rome endures? But, following the story, did you hear what Simonides said to him?"

"If Ilderim is a grave man, Simonides is a wise one," Malluch replied. "I listened, and he said— But hark! Some one comes overtaking us."

The noise grew louder, until presently they



heard the rumble of wheels mixed with the beating of horse-hoofs—a moment later Sheik Ilderim himself appeared on horseback followed by a train, among which were the four wine-red Arabs drawing the chariot. The sheik's chin, in its muffling of long white beard, was drooped upon his breast. Our friends had out-travelled him; but at sight of them he raised his head and spoke kindly.

"Peace to you!—Ah, my friend Malluch! Welcome! And tell me you are not going, but just come; that you have something for me from the good Simonides—may the Lord of his fathers keep him in life for many years to come! Aye, take up the straps, both of you, and follow me. I have bread and leben, or, if you prefer it, arrack, and the flesh of young kid. Come!"

They followed after him to the door of the tent, in which, when they were dismounted, he stood to receive them, holding a platter with three cups filled with creamy liquor just drawn from a great smoke-stained skin bottle, pendent from the central post.

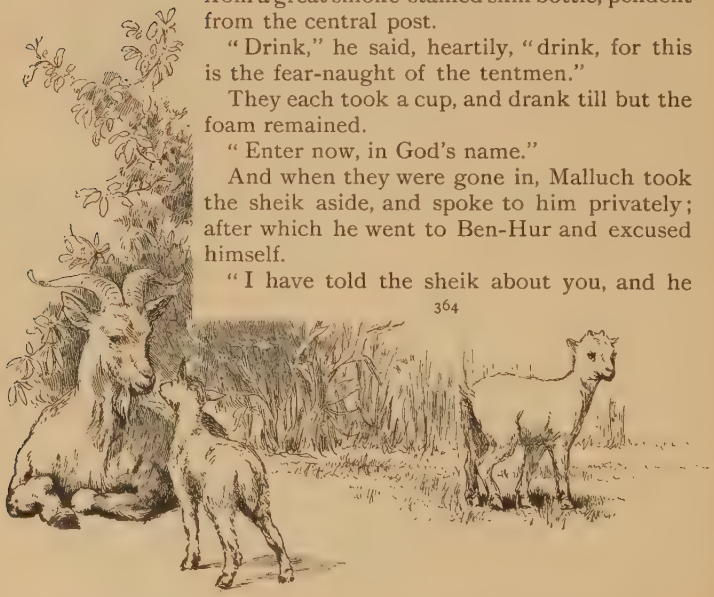
"Drink," he said, heartily, "drink, for this is the fear-naught of the tentmen."

They each took a cup, and drank till but the foam remained.

"Enter now, in God's name."

And when they were gone in, Malluch took the sheik aside, and spoke to him privately; after which he went to Ben-Hur and excused himself.

"I have told the sheik about you, and he



will give you the trial of his horses in the morning. He is your friend. Having done for you all I can, you must do the rest, and let me return to Antioch. There is one there who has my promise to meet him to-night. I have no choice but to go. I will come back to-morrow prepared, if all goes well in the mean time, to stay with you until the games are over."

With blessings given and received, Malluch set out in return.

CHAPTER XI

THE WISE SERVANT AND HIS DAUGHTER

WHAT time the lower horn of a new moon touched the castellated piles on Mount Sulpius, and two-thirds of the people of Antioch were out on their house-tops comforting themselves with the night breeze when it blew, and with fans when it failed, Simonides sat in the chair which had come to be a part of him, and from the terrace looked down over the river, and his ships a-swing at their moorings. The wall at his back cast its shadow broadly over the water to the opposite shore. Above him the endless tramp upon the bridge went on. Esther was holding a plate for him containing his frugal supper — some wheaten cakes, light as wafers, some honey, and a bowl of milk, into which he now and then dipped the wafers after dipping them into the honey.

"Malluch is a laggard to-night," he said, showing where his thoughts were.

"Do you believe he will come?" Esther asked.

"Unless he has taken to the sea or the desert, and is yet following on, he will come."

Simonides spoke with quiet confidence.

"He may write," she said.

"Not so, Esther. He would have despatched a letter when he found he could not return, and told me so; because I have not received such a letter, I know he can come, and will."

"I hope so," she said, very softly.

Something in the utterance attracted his attention; it might have been the tone, it might have been the wish. The smallest bird cannot light upon the greatest tree without sending a shock to its most distant fibre; every mind is at times no less sensitive to the most trifling words.

"You wish him to come, Esther?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, lifting her eyes to his.

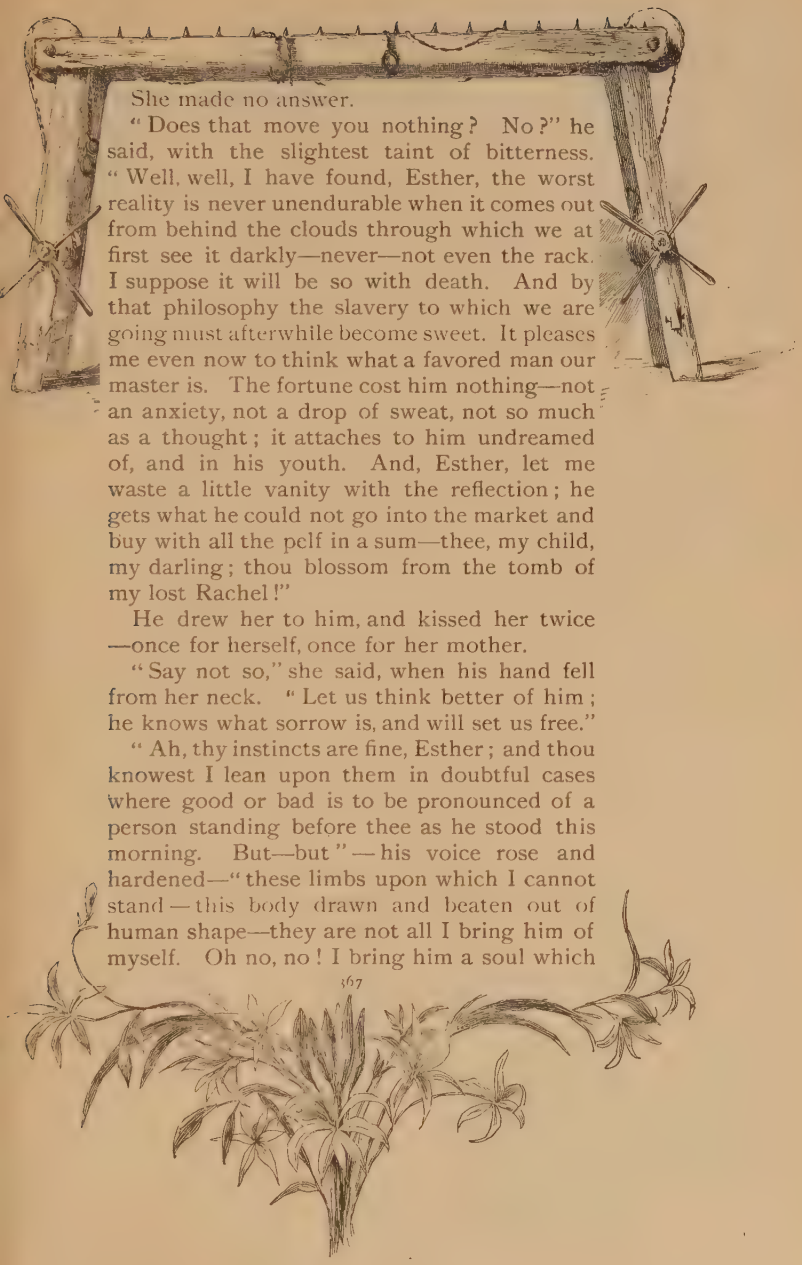
"Why? Can you tell me?" he persisted.

"Because"—she hesitated, then began again—"because the young man is—" The stop was full.

"Our master. Is that the word?"

"Yes."

"And you still think I should not suffer him to go away without telling him to come, if he chooses, and take us—and all we have—all, Esther—the goods, the shekels, the ships, the slaves, and the mighty credit, which is a mantle of cloth of gold and finest silver spun for me by the greatest of the angels of men—Success."



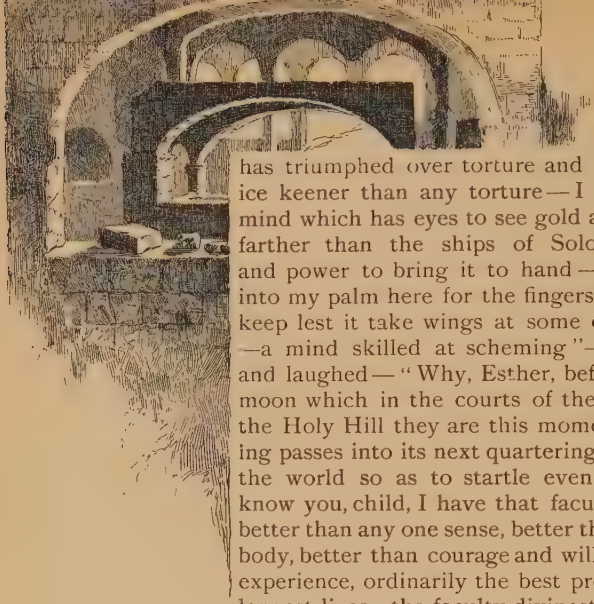
She made no answer.

"Does that move you nothing? No?" he said, with the slightest taint of bitterness. "Well, well, I have found, Esther, the worst reality is never unendurable when it comes out from behind the clouds through which we at first see it darkly—never—not even the rack. I suppose it will be so with death. And by that philosophy the slavery to which we are going must afterwhile become sweet. It pleases me even now to think what a favored man our master is. The fortune cost him nothing—not an anxiety, not a drop of sweat, not so much as a thought; it attaches to him undreamed of, and in his youth. And, Esther, let me waste a little vanity with the reflection; he gets what he could not go into the market and buy with all the pelf in a sum—thee, my child, my darling; thou blossom from the tomb of my lost Rachel!"

He drew her to him, and kissed her twice —once for herself, once for her mother.

"Say not so," she said, when his hand fell from her neck. "Let us think better of him; he knows what sorrow is, and will set us free."

"Ah, thy instincts are fine, Esther; and thou knowest I lean upon them in doubtful cases where good or bad is to be pronounced of a person standing before thee as he stood this morning. But—but"—his voice rose and hardened—"these limbs upon which I cannot stand—this body drawn and beaten out of human shape—they are not all I bring him of myself. Oh no, no! I bring him a soul which



has triumphed over torture and Roman malice keener than any torture — I bring him a mind which has eyes to see gold at a distance farther than the ships of Solomon sailed, and power to bring it to hand — aye, Esther, into my palm here for the fingers to grip and keep lest it take wings at some other's word —a mind skilled at scheming"—he stopped and laughed — "Why, Esther, before the new moon which in the courts of the Temple on the Holy Hill they are this moment celebrating passes into its next quartering I could ring the world so as to startle even Cæsar; for know you, child, I have that faculty which is better than any one sense, better than a perfect body, better than courage and will, better than experience, ordinarily the best product of the longest lives—the faculty divinest of men, but which"—he stopped, and laughed again, not bitterly, but with real zest—"but which even the great do not sufficiently account, while with the herd it is a non-existent—the faculty of drawing men to my purpose and holding them faithfully to its achievement, by which, as against things to be done, I multiply myself into hundreds and thousands. So the captains of my ships plough the seas, and bring me honest returns; so Malluch follows the youth, our master, and will" — just then a footstep was heard upon the terrace—"Ha, Esther! said I not so? He is here, and we will have tidings. For thy sake, sweet child—my lily just budded —I pray the Lord God, who has not forgotten his wandering sheep of Israel, that they be

good and comforting. Now we will know if he will let thee go with all thy beauty, and me with all my faculties."

Malluch came to the chair.

"Peace to you, good master," he said, with a low obeisance — "and to you, Esther, most excellent of daughters."

He stood before them deferentially, and the attitude and the address left it difficult to define his relation to them; the one was that of a servant, the other indicated the familiar and friend. On the other side, Simonides, as was his habit in business, after answering the salutation went straight to the subject.

"What of the young man, Malluch?"

The events of the day were told quietly and in the simplest words, and until he was through there was no interruption; nor did the listener in the chair so much as move a hand during the narration; but for his eyes, wide open and bright, and an occasional long-drawn breath, he might have been accounted an effigy.

"Thank you, thank you, Malluch," he said, heartily, at the conclusion; "you have done well — no one could have done better. Now what say you of the young man's nationality?"

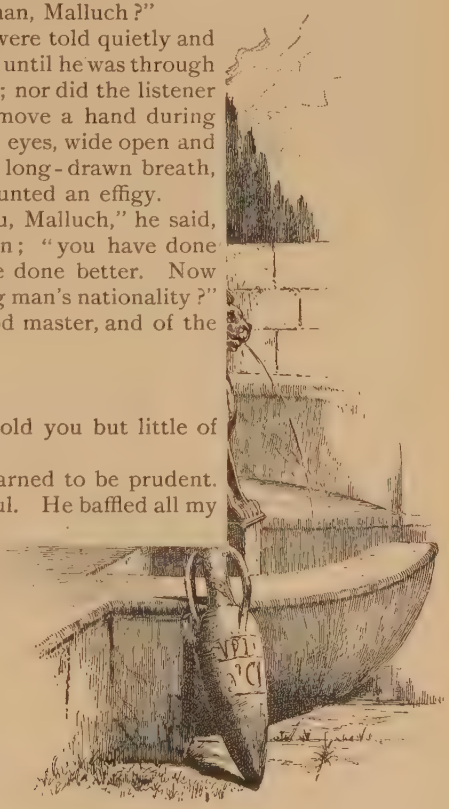
"He is an Israelite, good master, and of the tribe of Judah."

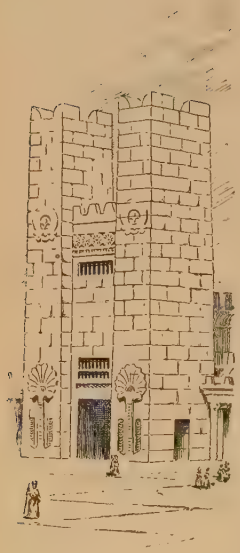
"You are positive?"

"Very positive."

"He appears to have told you but little of his life."

"He has somewhere learned to be prudent. I might call him distrustful. He baffled all my





attempts upon his confidence until we started from the Castalian fount going to the village of Daphne."

"A place of abomination! Why went he there?"

"I would say from curiosity, the first motive of the many who go; but, very strangely, he took no interest in the things he saw. Of the Temple, he merely asked if it were Grecian. Good master, the young man has a trouble of mind from which he would hide, and he went to the Grove, I think, as we go to sepulchres with our dead — he went to bury it."

"That were well, if so," Simonides said, in a low voice; then louder, "Malluch, the curse of the time is prodigality. The poor make themselves poorer as apes of the rich, and the merely rich carry themselves like princes. Saw you signs of the weakness in the youth? Did he display moneys—coin of Rome or Israel?"

"None, none, good master."

"Surely, Malluch, where there are so many inducements to folly—so much, I mean, to eat and drink—surely he made you generous offer of some sort. His age, if nothing more, would warrant that much."

"He neither ate nor drank in my company."

"In what he said or did, Malluch, could you in anywise detect his master-idea? You know they peep through cracks close enough to stop the wind."

"Give me to understand you," said Malluch, in doubt.

PILGRIMS ENTERING BETHLEHEM, CHRISTMAS

"Well, you know we nor speak nor act, much less decide grave questions concerning ourselves, except as we be driven by a motive. In that respect, what made you of him?"

"As to that, Master Simonides, I can answer with much assurance. He is devoted to finding his mother and sister—that first. Then he has a grievance against Rome; and as the Messala of whom I told you had something to do with the wrong, the great present object is to humiliate him. The meeting at the fountain furnished an opportunity, but it was put aside as not sufficiently public."

"The Messala is influential," said Simonides, thoughtfully.

"Yes; but the next meeting will be in the Circus."

"Well—and then?"

"The son of Arrius will win."

"How know you?"

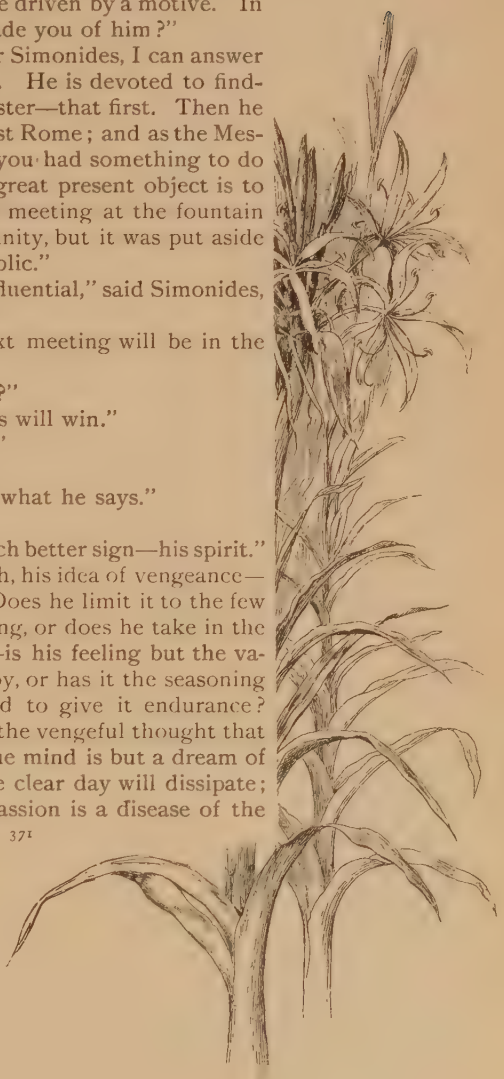
Malluch smiled.

"I am judging by what he says."

"Is that all?"

"No; there is a much better sign—his spirit."

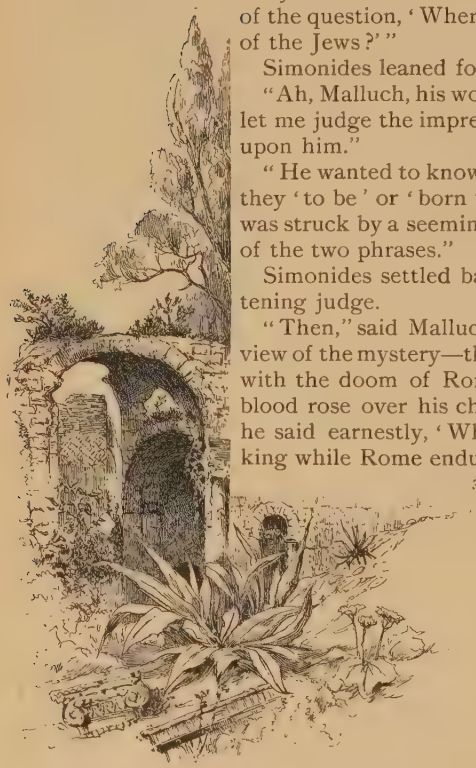
"Aye; but, Malluch, his idea of vengeance—what is its scope? Does he limit it to the few who did him the wrong, or does he take in the many? And more—is his feeling but the vagary of a sensitive boy, or has it the seasoning of suffering manhood to give it endurance? You know, Malluch, the vengeful thought that has root merely in the mind is but a dream of idlest sort which one clear day will dissipate; while revenge the passion is a disease of the



heart which climbs up, up to the brain, and feeds itself on both alike."

In this question, Simonides for the first time showed signs of feeling; he spoke with rapid utterance, and with clinched hands and the eagerness of a man illustrating the disease he described?

"Good my master," Malluch replied, "one of my reasons for believing the young man a Jew is the intensity of his hate. It was plain to me he had himself under watch, as was natural, seeing how long he has lived in an atmosphere of Roman jealousy; yet I saw it blaze—once when he wanted to know Ilderim's feeling towards Rome, and again when I told him the story of the sheik and the wise man, and spoke of the question, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?'"



Simonides leaned forward quickly.

"Ah, Malluch, his words—give me his words; let me judge the impression the mystery made upon him."

"He wanted to know the exact words. Were they 'to be' or 'born to be?' It appeared he was struck by a seeming difference in the effect of the two phrases."

Simonides settled back into his pose of listening judge.

"Then," said Malluch, "I told him Ilderim's view of the mystery—that the king would come with the doom of Rome. The young man's blood rose over his cheeks and forehead, and he said earnestly, 'Who but a Herod can be king while Rome endures?'"

"Meaning what?"

"That the empire must be destroyed before there could be another rule."

Simonides gazed for a time at the ships and their shadows slowly swinging together in the river; when he looked up, it was to end the interview.

"Enough, Malluch," he said. "Get you to eat, and make ready to return to the Orchard of Palms; you must help the young man in his coming trial. Come to me in the morning. I will send a letter to Ilderim." Then, in an undertone, as if to himself, he added, "I may attend the Circus myself."

When Malluch after the customary benediction given and received was gone, Simonides took a deep draught of milk, and seemed refreshed and easy of mind.

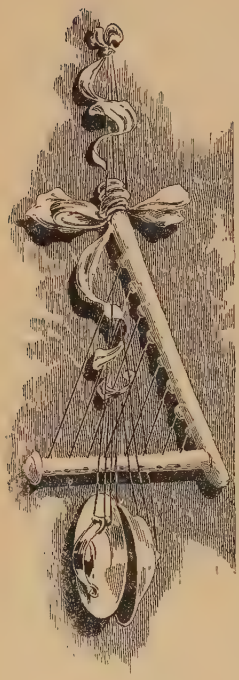
"Put the meal down, Esther," he said; "it is over."

She obeyed.

"Here now."

She resumed her place upon the arm of the chair close to him.

"God is good to me, very good," he said, fervently. "His habit is to move in mystery, yet sometimes he permits us to think we see and understand him. I am old, dear, and must go; but now, in this eleventh hour, when my hope was beginning to die, he sends me this one with a promise, and I am lifted up. I see the way to a great part in a circumstance itself so great that it shall be as a new birth to the whole world. And I see a reason for the gift



of my great riches, and the end for which they were designed. Verily, my child, I take hold on life anew."

Esther nestled closer to him, as if to bring his thoughts from their far-flying.

"The king has been born," he continued, imagining he was still speaking to her, "and he must be near the half of common life. Balthasar says he was a child on his mother's lap when he saw him, and gave him presents and worship; and Ilderim holds it was twenty-seven years ago last December when Balthasar and his companions came to his tent asking a hiding-place from Herod. Wherefore the coming cannot now be long delayed. To-night —to-morrow it may be. Holy fathers of Israel, what happiness in the thought! I seem to hear the crash of the falling of old walls and the clamor of a universal change—aye, and for the uttermost joy of men, the earth opens to take Rome in, and they look up and laugh and sing that she is not, while we are;" then he laughed at himself. "Why, Esther, heard you ever the like? Surely, I have on me the passion of a singer, the heat of blood and the thrill of Miriam and David. In my thoughts, which should be those of a plain worker in figures and facts, there is a confusion of cymbals clashing and harp-strings loud beaten, and the voices of a multitude standing around a new-risen throne. I will put the thinking by for the present; only, dear, when the king comes he will need money and men, for as he was a child born of woman he will be but a man after all.

bound to human ways as you and I are. And for the money he will have need of getters and keepers, and for the men leaders. There, there! See you not a broad road for my walking, and the running of the youth our master?—and at the end of it glory and revenge for us both?—and—and"—he paused, struck with the selfishness of a scheme in which she had no part or good result; then added, kissing her, "And happiness for thy mother's child."

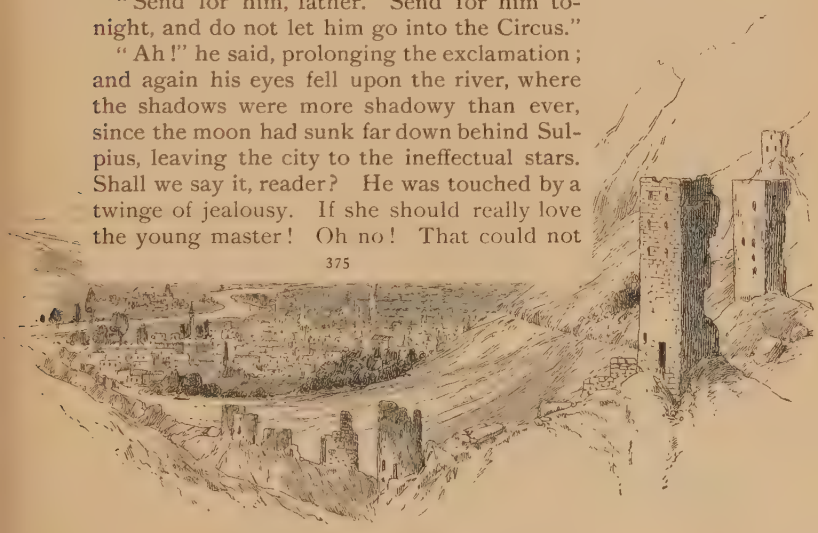
She sat still, saying nothing. Then he remembered the difference in natures, and the law by which we are not permitted always to take delight in the same cause or be equally afraid of the same thing. He remembered she was but a girl.

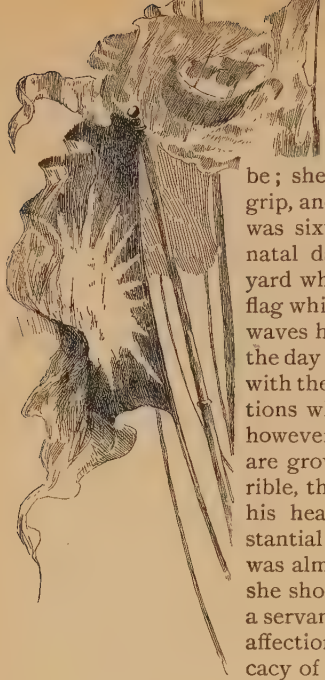
"Of what are you thinking, Esther?" he said, in his common home-like way. "If the thought have the form of a wish, give it me, little one, while the power remains mine. For power, you know, is a fretful thing, and hath its wings always spread for flight."

She answered, with a simplicity almost childish,

"Send for him, father. Send for him to-night, and do not let him go into the Circus."

"Ah!" he said, prolonging the exclamation; and again his eyes fell upon the river, where the shadows were more shadowy than ever, since the moon had sunk far down behind Sulpius, leaving the city to the ineffectual stars. Shall we say it, reader? He was touched by a twinge of jealousy. If she should really love the young master! Oh no! That could not





be; she was too young. But the idea had fast grip, and directly held him still and cold. She was sixteen. He knew it well. On the last natal day he had gone with her to the ship-yard where there was a launch, and the yellow flag which the galley bore to its bridal with the waves had on it "Esther;" so they celebrated the day together. Yet the fact struck him now with the force of a surprise. There are realizations which come to us all painfully; mostly, however, such as pertain to ourselves; that we are growing old, for instance; and, more terrible, that we must die. Such a one crept into his heart, shadowy as the shadows, yet substantial enough to wring from him a sigh which was almost a groan. It was not sufficient that she should enter upon her young womanhood a servant, but she must carry to her master her affections, the truth and tenderness and delicacy of which he, the father, so well knew, because to this time they had all been his own undividedly. The fiend whose task it is to torture us with fears and bitter thoughts seldom does his work by halves. In the pang of the moment, the brave old man lost sight of his new scheme, and of the miraculous king its subject. By a mighty effort, however, he controlled himself, and asked, calmly, "Not go into the Circus, Esther? Why, child?"

"It is not a place for a son of Israel, father."

"Rabbinical, rabbinical, Esther! Is that all?"

The tone of the inquiry was searching, and

went to her heart, which began to beat loudly —so loudly she could not answer. A confusion new and strangely pleasant fell upon her.

"The young man is to have the fortune," he said, taking her hand, and speaking more tenderly; "he is to have the ships and the shekels—all, Esther, all. Yet I did not feel poor, for thou wert left me, and thy love so like the dead Rachel's. Tell me, is he to have that too?"

She bent over him, and laid her cheek against his head.

"Speak, Esther. I will be the stronger of the knowledge. In warning there is strength."

She sat up then, and spoke as if she were Truth's holy self.

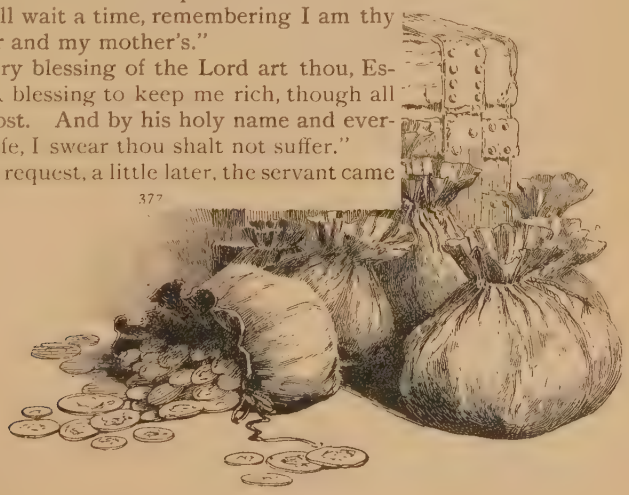
"Comfort thee, father. I will never leave thee; though he take my love, I will be thy handmaid ever as now."

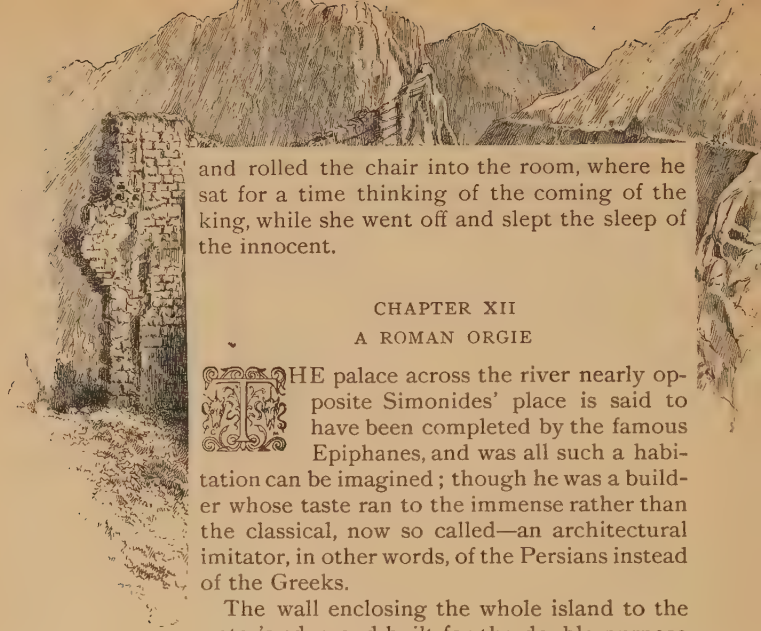
And, stooping, she kissed him.

"And more," she said, continuing, "he is comely in my sight, and the pleading of his voice drew me to him, and I shudder to think of him in danger. Yes, father, I would be more than glad to see him again. Still, the love that is unrequited cannot be perfect love, wherefore I will wait a time, remembering I am thy daughter and my mother's."

"A very blessing of the Lord art thou, Esther! A blessing to keep me rich, though all else be lost. And by his holy name and everlasting life, I swear thou shalt not suffer."

At his request, a little later, the servant came





and rolled the chair into the room, where he sat for a time thinking of the coming of the king, while she went off and slept the sleep of the innocent.

CHAPTER XII

A ROMAN ORGIE

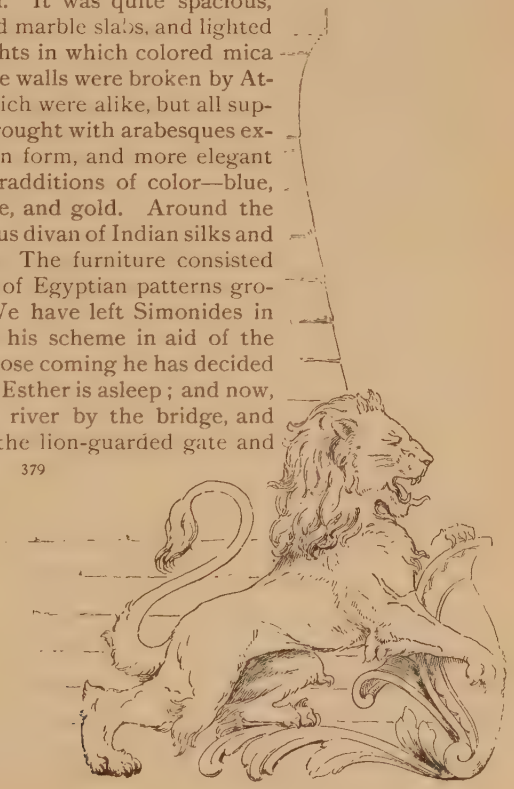
THE palace across the river nearly opposite Simonides' place is said to have been completed by the famous Epiphanes, and was all such a habitation can be imagined; though he was a builder whose taste ran to the immense rather than the classical, now so called—an architectural imitator, in other words, of the Persians instead of the Greeks.

The wall enclosing the whole island to the water's edge, and built for the double purpose of bulwark against the river and defence against the mob, was said to have rendered the palace unfit for constant occupancy, insomuch that the legates abandoned it and moved to another residence erected for them on the western ridge of Mount Sulpius, under the Temple of Jupiter. Persons were not wanting, however, who flatly denied the bill against the ancient abode. They said, with shrewdness, at least, that the real object of the removal of the legates was not a more healthful locality, but the assurance afforded them by the huge barracks, named, according to the prevalent style, citadel, situated just over the way on the eastern ridge of the mount. And the opinion had

plausible showing. Among other pertinent things, it was remarked that the palace was kept in perpetual readiness for use; and when a consul, general of the army, king, or visiting potentate of any kind arrived at Antioch, quarters were at once assigned him on the island.

As we have to do with but one apartment in the old pile, the residue of it is left to the reader's fancy; and as pleases him, he may go through its gardens, baths, halls, and labyrinth of rooms to the pavilions on the roof, all furnished as became a house of fame in a city which was more nearly Milton's "gorgeous East" than any other in the world.

At this age the apartment alluded to would be termed a saloon. It was quite spacious, floored with polished marble slabs, and lighted in the day by skylights in which colored mica served as glass. The walls were broken by Atlantes, no two of which were alike, but all supporting a cornice wrought with arabesques exceedingly intricate in form, and more elegant on account of superadditions of color—blue, green, Tyrian purple, and gold. Around the room ran a continuous divan of Indian silks and wool of Cashmere. The furniture consisted of tables and stools of Egyptian patterns grotesquely carved. We have left Simonides in his chair perfecting his scheme in aid of the miraculous king, whose coming he has decided is so close at hand. Esther is asleep; and now, having crossed the river by the bridge, and made way through the lion-guarded gate and

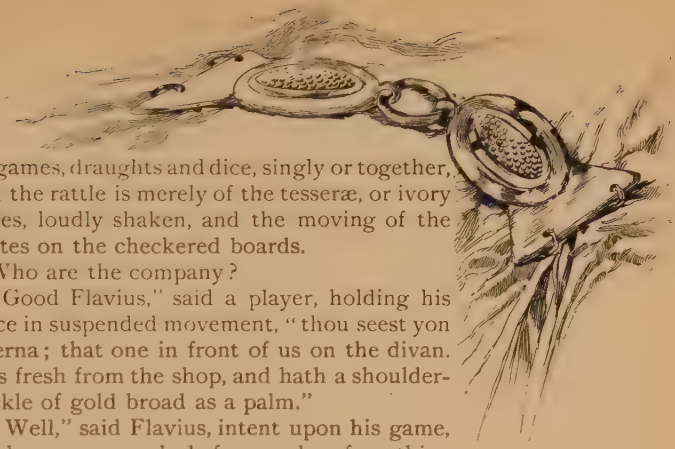


a number of Babylonian halls and courts, let us enter the gilded saloon.

There are five chandeliers hanging by sliding bronze chains from the ceiling—one in each corner, and in the centre one—enormous pyramids of lighted lamps, illuminating even the demoniac faces of the Atlantes and the complex tracery of the cornice. About the tables, seated or standing, or moving restlessly from one to another, there are probably a hundred persons, whom we must study at least for a moment.

They are all young, some of them little more than boys. That they are Italians and mostly Romans is past doubt. They all speak Latin in purity, while each one appears in the in-door dress of the great capital on the Tiber; that is, in tunics short of sleeve and skirt, a style of vesture well adapted to the climate of Antioch, and especially comfortable in the too close atmosphere of the saloon. On the divan here and there togas and lacernæ lie where they have been carelessly tossed, some of them significantly bordered with purple. On the divan also lie sleepers stretched at ease; whether they were overcome by the heat and fatigue of the sultry day or by Bacchus we will not pause to inquire.

The hum of voices is loud and incessant. Sometimes there is an explosion of laughter, sometimes a burst of rage or exultation; but over all prevails a sharp, prolonged rattle, at first somewhat confusing to the non-familiar. If we approach the tables, however, the mystery solves itself. The company is at the favor-



ite games, draughts and dice, singly or together, and the rattle is merely of the tesseræ, or ivory cubes, loudly shaken, and the moving of the hostes on the checkered boards.

Who are the company?

"Good Flavius," said a player, holding his piece in suspended movement, "thou seest yon lacerna; that one in front of us on the divan. It is fresh from the shop, and hath a shoulder-buckle of gold broad as a palm."

"Well," said Flavius, intent upon his game, "I have seen such before; wherefore thine may not be old, yet, by the girdle of Venus, it is not new! What of it?"

"Nothing. Only I would give it to find a man who knows everything."

"Ha, ha! For something cheaper I will find thee here several with purple who will take thy offer. But play."

"There — check!"

"So, by all the Jupiters! Now, what sayest thou? Again?"

"Be it so."

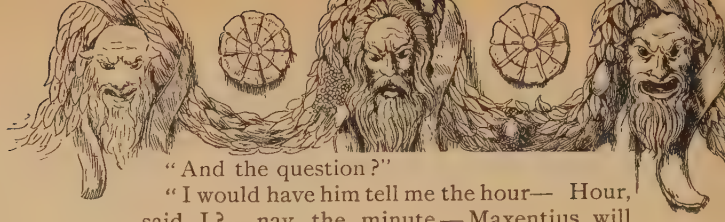
"And the wager?"

"A sestertium."

Then each drew his tablets and stilus and made a memorandum; and, while they were resetting the pieces, Flavius returned to his friend's remark.

"A man who knows everything! Hercle! the oracles would die. What wouldst thou with such a monster?"

"Answer to one question, my Flavius; then, perpol! I would cut his throat."



"And the question?"

"I would have him tell me the hour— Hour, said I?—nay, the minute—Maxentius will arrive to-morrow."

"Good play, good play! I have you! And why the minute?"

"Hast thou ever stood uncovered in the Syrian sun on the quay at which he will land? The fires of the Vesta are not so hot; and, by the Stator of our father Romulus, I would die, if die I must, in Rome. Avernus is here; there, in the square before the Forum, I could stand, and, with my hand raised thus, touch the floor of the gods. Ha, by Venus, my Flavius, thou didst beguile me! I have lost. O Fortune!"

"Again?"

"I must have back my sestertium."

"Be it so."

And they played again and again; and when day, stealing through the skylights, began to dim the lamps, it found the two in the same places at the same table, still at the game. Like most of the company, they were military attachés of the consul, awaiting his arrival and amusing themselves meantime.

During this conversation a party entered the room, and, unnoticed at first, proceeded to the central table. The signs were that they had come from a revel just dismissed. Some of them kept their feet with difficulty. Around the leader's brow was a chaplet which marked him master of the feast, if not the giver. The wine had made no impression upon him un-

less to heighten his beauty, which was of the most manly Roman style; he carried his head high raised; the blood flushed his lips and cheeks brightly; his eyes glittered; though the manner in which, shrouded in a toga spotless white and of ample folds, he walked was too nearly imperial for one sober and not a Cæsar. In going to the table, he made room for himself and his followers with little ceremony and no apologies; and when at length he stopped and looked over it and at the players, they all turned to him, with a shout like a cheer.

"Messala! Messala!" they cried.

Those in distant quarters, hearing the cry, re-echoed it where they were. Instantly there were dissolutions of groups, and breaking-up of games, and a general rush towards the centre.

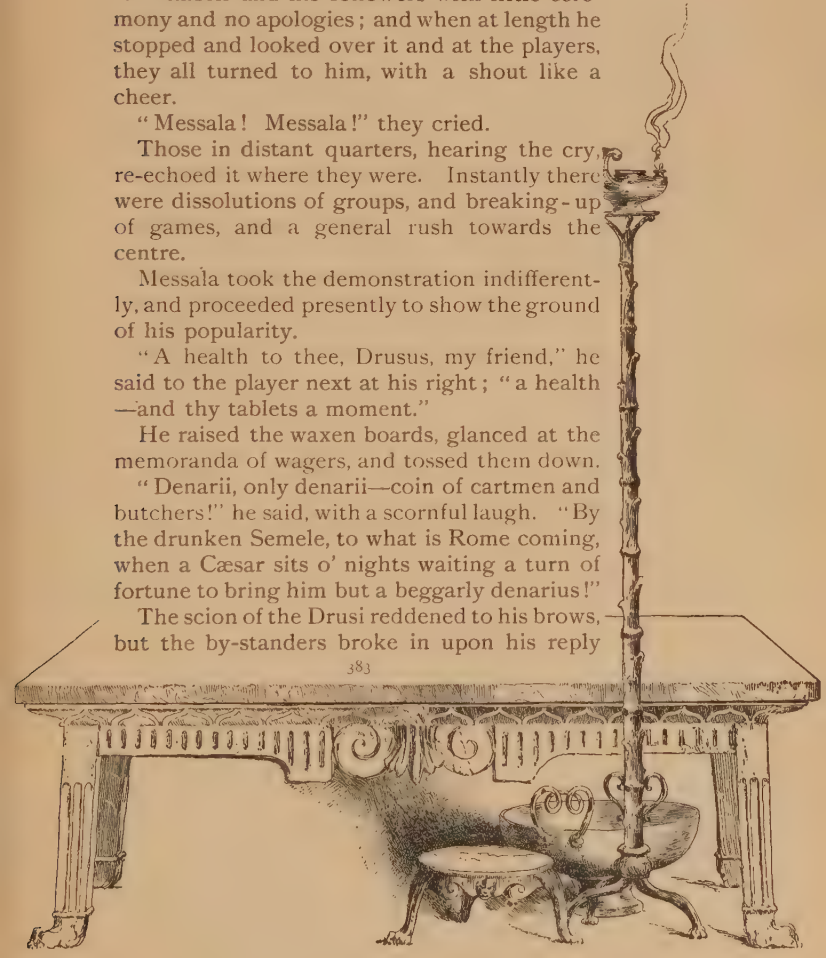
Messala took the demonstration indifferently, and proceeded presently to show the ground of his popularity.

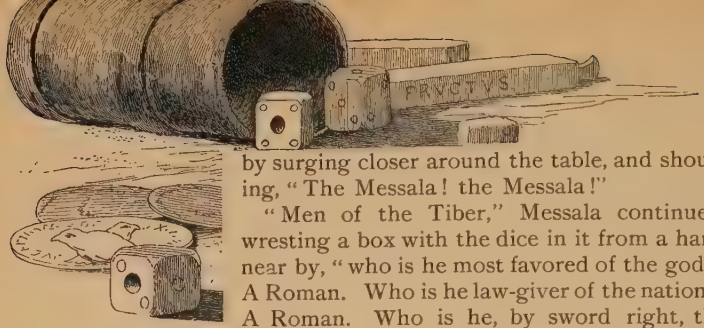
"A health to thee, Drusus, my friend," he said to the player next at his right; "a health —and thy tablets a moment."

He raised the waxen boards, glanced at the memoranda of wagers, and tossed them down.

"Denarii, only denarii—coin of cartmen and butchers!" he said, with a scornful laugh. "By the drunken Semele, to what is Rome coming, when a Cæsar sits o' nights waiting a turn of fortune to bring him but a beggarly denarius!"

The scion of the Drusi reddened to his brows, but the by-standers broke in upon his reply





by surging closer around the table, and shouting, "The Messala! the Messala!"

"Men of the Tiber," Messala continued, wresting a box with the dice in it from a hand near by, "who is he most favored of the gods? A Roman. Who is he law-giver of the nations? A Roman. Who is he, by sword right, the universal master?"

The company were of the easily inspired, and the thought was one to which they were born; in a twinkling they snatched the answer from him.

"A Roman, a Roman!" they shouted.

"Yet—yet"—he lingered to catch their ears —"yet there is a better than the best of Rome."

He tossed his patrician head and paused, as if to sting them with his sneer.

"Hear ye?" he asked. "There is a better than the best of Rome."

"Aye—Hercules!" cried one.

"Bacchus!" yelled a satirist.

"Jove—Jove!" thundered the crowd.

"No," Messala answered, "among men."

"Name him, name him!" they demanded.

"I will," he said, the next lull. "He who to the perfection of Rome hath added the perfection of the East; who to the arm of conquest, which is Western, hath also the art needful to the enjoyment of dominion, which is Eastern."

"Perpol! His best is a Roman, after all," some one shouted; and there was a great laugh, and long clapping of hands—an admission that Messala had the advantage.

"In the East," he continued, "we have no gods, only Wine, Women, and Fortune, and the greatest of them is Fortune; wherefore our motto, 'Who dareth what I dare?'—fit for the senate, fit for battle, fittest for him who, seeking the best, challenges the worst."

His voice dropped into an easy, familiar tone, but without relaxing the ascendency he had gained.

"In the great chest up in the citadel I have five talents coin current in the markets, and here are the receipts for them."

From his tunic he drew a roll of paper, and, flinging it on the table, continued, amid breathless silence, every eye having him in view fixed on his, every ear listening:

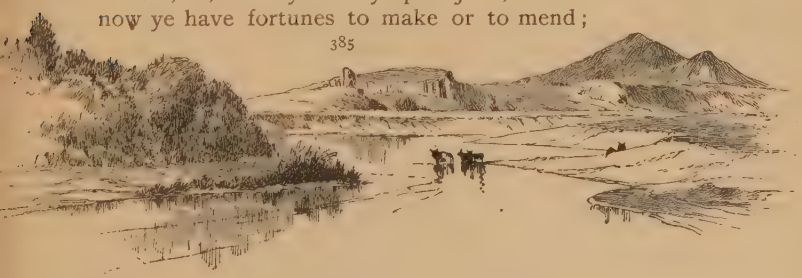
"The sum lies there the measure of what I dare. Who of you dares so much? You are silent. Is it too great? I will strike off one talent. What! still silent? Come, then, throw me once for these three talents—only three; for two; for one—one at least—one for the honor of the river by which you were born — Rome East against Rome West! — Orontes the barbarous against Tiber the sacred!"

He rattled the dice overhead while waiting.

"The Orontes against the Tiber!" he repeated, with an increase of scornful emphasis.

Not a man moved; then he flung the box upon the table, and, laughing, took up the receipts.

"Ha, ha, ha! By the Olympian Jove, I know now ye have fortunes to make or to mend;



therefore are ye come to Antioch. Ho, Cecilius!"

"Here, Messala!" cried a man behind him; "here am I, perishing in the mob, and begging a drachma to settle with the ragged ferryman. But, Pluto take me! these new ones have not so much as an obolus among them."

The sally provoked a burst of laughter, under which the saloon rang and rang again. Messala alone kept his gravity.

"Go, thou," he said to Cecilius, "to the chamber whence we came, and bid the servants bring the amphoræ here, and the cups and goblets. If these our countrymen, looking for fortune, have not purses, by the Syrian Bacchus, I will see if they are not better blessed with stomachs! Haste thee!"

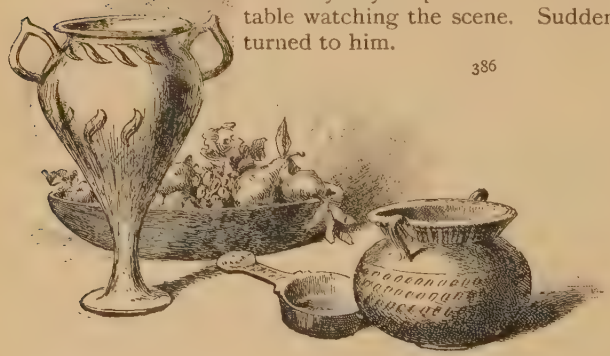
Then he turned to Drusus, with a laugh heard throughout the apartment.

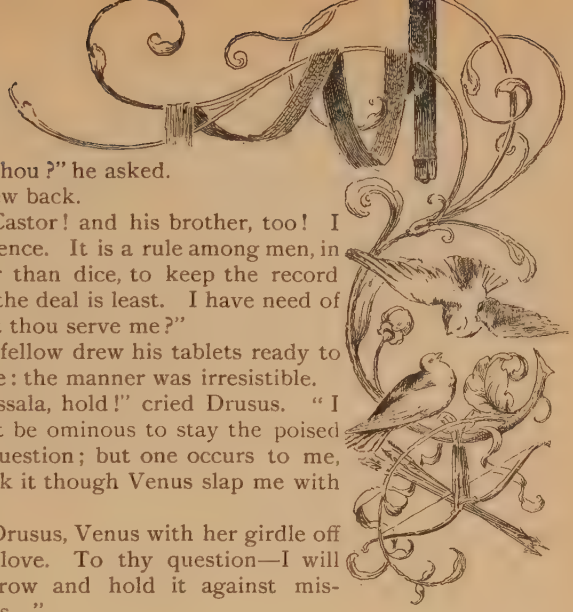
"Ha, ha, my friend! Be thou not offended because I levelled the Cæsar in thee down to the denarii. Thou seest I did but use the name to try these fine fledglings of our old Rome. Come, my Drusus, come!" He took up the box again and rattled the dice merrily. "Here, for what sum thou wilt, let us measure fortunes."

The manner was frank, cordial, winsome. Drusus melted in a moment.

"By the Nymphæ, yes!" he said, laughing. "I will throw with thee, Messala—for a denarius."

A very boyish person was looking over the table watching the scene. Suddenly Messala turned to him.





"Who art thou?" he asked.

The lad drew back.

"Nay, by Castor! and his brother, too! I meant not offence. It is a rule among men, in matters other than dice, to keep the record closest when the deal is least. I have need of a clerk. Wilt thou serve me?"

The young fellow drew his tablets ready to keep the score: the manner was irresistible.

"Hold, Messala, hold!" cried Drusus. "I know not if it be ominous to stay the poised dice with a question; but one occurs to me, and I must ask it though Venus slap me with her girdle."

"Nay, my Drusus, Venus with her girdle off is Venus in love. To thy question—I will make the throw and hold it against mischance. Thus—"

He turned the box upon the table and held it firmly over the dice.

And Drusus asked, "Did you ever see one Quintus Arrius?"

"The duumvir?"

"No—his son?"

"I knew not he had a son."

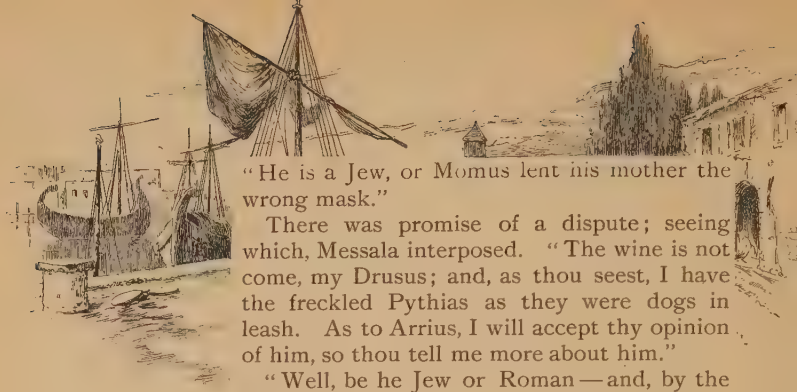
"Well, it is nothing," Drusus added, indifferently; "only, my Messala, Pollux was not more like Castor than Arrius is like thee."

The remark had the effect of a signal: twenty voices took it up.

"True, true! His eyes—his face," they cried.

"What!" answered one, disgusted. "Messala is a Roman; Arrius is a Jew."

"Thou sayest right," a third exclaimed.



"He is a Jew, or Momus lent his mother the wrong mask."

There was promise of a dispute; seeing which, Messala interposed. "The wine is not come, my Drusus; and, as thou seest, I have the freckled Pythias as they were dogs in leash. As to Arrius, I will accept thy opinion of him, so thou tell me more about him."

"Well, be he Jew or Roman — and, by the great god Pan, I say it not in disrespect of thy feelings, my Messala! — this Arrius is handsome and brave and shrewd. The emperor offered him favor and patronage, which he refused. He came up through mystery, and keepeth distance as if he felt himself better or knew himself worse than the rest of us. In the palæstræ he was unmatched; he played with the blue-eyed giants from the Rhine and the hornless bulls of Sarmatia as they were willow wisps. The duumvir left him vastly rich. He has a passion for arms, and thinks of nothing but war. Maxentius admitted him into his family, and he was to have taken ship with us, but we lost him at Ravenna. Nevertheless he arrived safely. We heard of him this morning. Perpol! Instead of coming to the palace or going to the citadel, he dropped his baggage at the khan, and hath disappeared again."

At the beginning of the speech Messala listened with polite indifference; as it proceeded, he became more attentive; at the conclusion, he took his hand from the dice-box, and called out, "Ho, my Caius! Dost thou hear?"

A youth at his elbow—his Myrtilus, or comrade, in the day's chariot practice—answered, much pleased with the attention, "Did I not, my Messala, I were not thy friend."

"Dost thou remember the man who gave thee the fall to-day?"

"By the love-locks of Bacchus, have I not a bruised shoulder to help me keep it in mind?" and he seconded the words with a shrug that submerged his ears.

"Well, be thou grateful to the Fates—I have found thy enemy. Listen."

Thereupon Messala turned to Drusus.

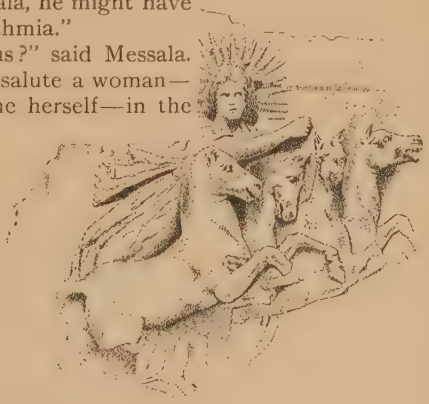
"Tell us more of him—perpol!—of him who is both Jew and Roman—by Phœbus, a combination to make a Centaur lovely! What garments doth he affect, my Drusus?"

"Those of the Jews."

"Hearest thou, Caius?" said Messala. "The fellow is young—one; he hath the visage of a Roman—two; he loveth best the garb of a Jew—three; and in the palæstræ fame and fortune come of arms to throw a horse or tilt a chariot, as the necessity may order—four. And, Drusus, help thou my friend again. Doubtless this Arrius hath tricks of language; otherwise he could not so confound himself, to-day a Jew, to-morrow a Roman; but of the rich tongue of Athene—discourseth he in that as well?"

"With such purity, Messala, he might have been a contestant in the Isthmia."

"Art thou listening, Caius?" said Messala. "The fellow is qualified to salute a woman—for that matter Aristomache herself—in the



Greek; and as I keep the count, that is five. What sayest thou?"

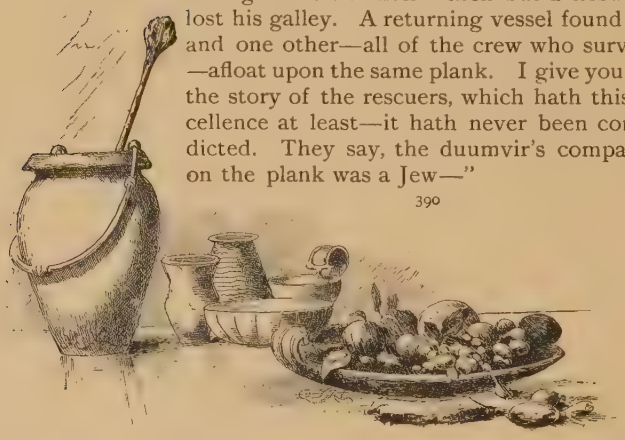
"Thou hast found him, my Messala," Caius answered; "or I am not myself."

"Thy pardon, Drusus—and pardon of all—for speaking in riddles thus," Messala said, in his winsome way. "By all the decent gods, I would not strain thy courtesy to the point of breaking, but now help thou me. See!"—he put his hand on the dice-box again, laughing—"See how close I hold the Pythias and their secret! Thou didst speak, I think, of mystery in connection with the coming of the son of Arrius. Tell me of that."

"'Tis nothing, Messala, nothing," Drusus replied; "a child's story. When Arrius, the father, sailed in pursuit of the pirates, he was without wife or family; he returned with a boy—him of whom we speak—and next day adopted him."

"Adopted him?" Messala repeated. "By the gods, Drusus, thou dost, indeed, interest me! Where did the duumvir find the boy? And who was he?"

"Who shall answer thee that, Messala? who but the young Arrius himself? Perpol! in the fight the duumvir—then but a tribune—lost his galley. A returning vessel found him and one other—all of the crew who survived—afloat upon the same plank. I give you now the story of the rescuers, which hath this excellence at least—it hath never been contradicted. They say, the duumvir's companion on the plank was a Jew—"



"A Jew!" echoed Messala.

"And a slave."

"How Drusus? A slave?"

"When the two were lifted to the deck, the duumvir was in his tribune's armor, and the other in the vesture of a rower."

Messala arose from leaning against the table.

"A galley"—he checked the debasing word, and looked around, for once in his life at loss. Just then a procession of slaves filed into the room, some with great jars of wine, others with baskets of fruits and confections, others again with cups and flagons, mostly silver. There was inspiration in the sight. Instantly Messala climbed upon a stool.

"Men of the Tiber," he said, in a clear voice, "let us turn this waiting for our chief into a feast of Bacchus. Whom choose ye for master?"

Drusus arose.

"Who shall be master but the giver of the feast?" he said. "Answer, Romans."

They gave their reply in a shout.

Messala took the chaplet from his head, gave it to Drusus, who climbed upon the table, and, in the view of all, solemnly replaced it, making Messala master of the night.

"There came with me into the room," he said, "some friends just risen from table. That our feast may have the approval of sacred custom, bring hither that one of them most overcome by wine."

A din of voices answered, "Here he is, here he is!"

And from the floor where he had fallen, a youth was brought forward, so effeminately beautiful he might have passed for the drinking-god himself — only the crown would have dropped from his head, and the thyrsus from his hand.

"Lift him upon the table," the master said.

It was found he could not sit.

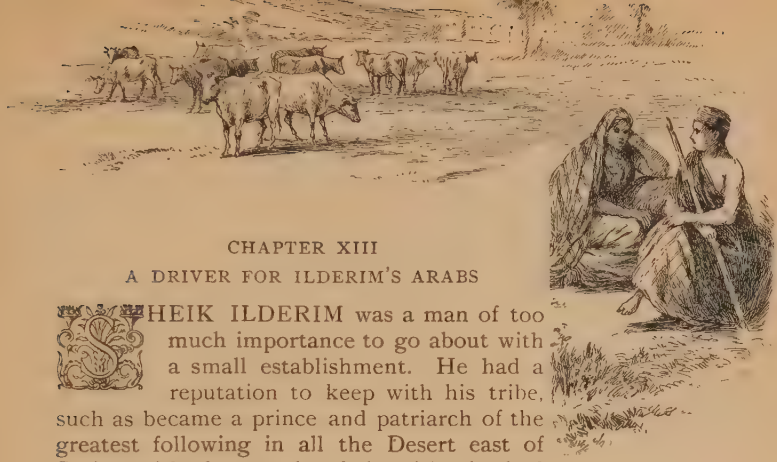
"Help him, Drusus, as the fair Nyone may yet help thee."

Drusus took the inebriate in his arms.

Then, addressing the limp figure, Messala said, amid profound silence, "O Bacchus! greatest of the gods, be thou propitious to-night. And for myself, and these thy votaries, I vow this chaplet" — and from his head he raised it reverently — "I vow this chaplet to thy altar in the Grove of Daphne."

He bowed, replaced the crown upon his locks, then stooped and uncovered the dice, saying, with a laugh, "See, my Drusus, by the ass of Silenus, the denarius is mine!"

There was a shout that set the floor to quaking, and the grim Atlantes to dancing, and the orgies began.

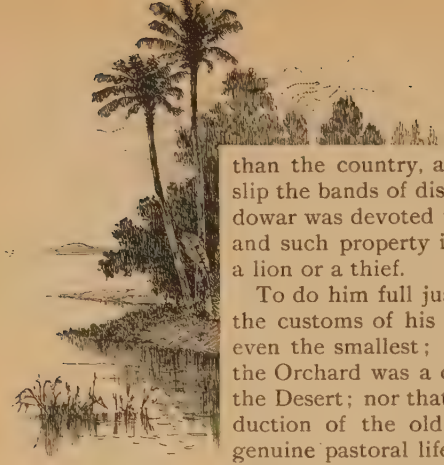


CHAPTER XIII

A DRIVER FOR ILDERIM'S ARABS

SHEIK ILDERIM was a man of too much importance to go about with a small establishment. He had a reputation to keep with his tribe, such as became a prince and patriarch of the greatest following in all the Desert east of Syria; with the people of the cities he had another reputation, which was that of one of the richest personages not a king in all the East; and, being rich in fact — in money as well as in servants, camels, horses, and flocks of all kinds — he took pleasure in a certain state, which, besides magnifying his dignity with strangers, contributed to his personal pride and comfort. Wherefore the reader must not be misled by the frequent reference to his tent in the Orchard of Palms. He had there really a respectable dowar; that is to say, he had there three large tents — one for himself, one for visitors, one for his favorite wife and her women; and six or eight lesser ones, occupied by his servants and such tribal retainers as he had chosen to bring with him as a body-guard —strong men of approved courage, and skilful with bow, spear, and horses.

To be sure, his property of whatever kind was in no danger at the Orchard; yet as the habits of a man go with him to town not less



than the country, and as it is never wise to slip the bands of discipline, the interior of the dowar was devoted to his cows, camels, goats, and such property in general as might tempt a lion or a thief.

To do him full justice, Ilderim kept well all the customs of his people, abating none, not even the smallest; in consequence his life at the Orchard was a continuation of his life in the Desert; nor that alone, it was a fair reproduction of the old patriarchal modes—the genuine pastoral life of primitive Israel.

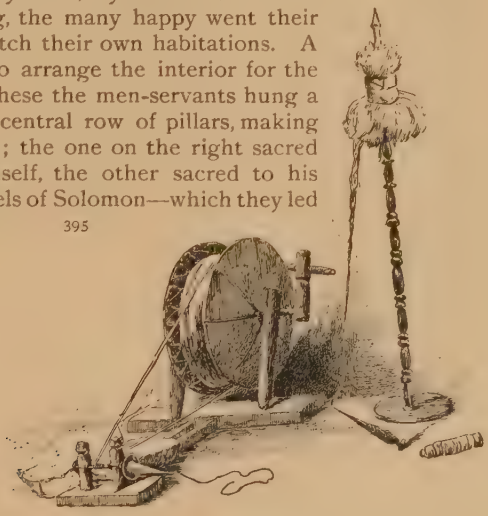
Recurring to the morning the caravan arrived at the Orchard—"Here, plant it here," he said, stopping his horse, and thrusting a spear into the ground. "Door to the south; the lake before it thus; and these, the children of the Desert, to sit under at the going-down of the sun."

At the last words he went to a group of three great palm-trees, and patted one of them as he would have patted his horse's neck, or the cheek of the child of his love.

Who but the sheik could of right say to the caravan, Halt! or of the tent, Here be it pitched? The spear was wrested from the ground, and over the wound it had riven in the sod the base of the first pillar of the tent was planted, marking the centre of the front door. Then eight others were planted—in all, three rows of pillars, three in a row. Then, at call, the women and children came, and unfolded the canvas from its packing on the camels. Who might do this but the women? Had

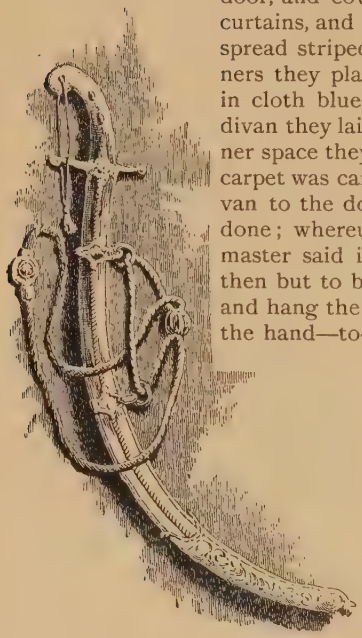
they not sheared the hair from the brown goats of the flock? and twisted it into thread? and woven the thread into cloth? and stitched the cloth together, making the perfect roof, dark brown in fact, though in the distance black as the tents of Kedar? And, finally, with what jests and laughter, and pulls altogether, the united following of the sheik stretched the canvas from pillar to pillar, driving the stakes and fastening the cords as they went! And when the walls of open reed matting were put in place—the finishing-touch to the building after the style of the Desert—with what hush of anxiety they waited the good man's judgment! When he walked in and out, looking at the house in connection with the sun, the trees, and the lake, and said, rubbing his hands with might of heartiness, "Well done! Make the dowar now as ye well know, and to-night we will sweeten the bread with arrack, and the milk with honey, and at every fire there shall be a kid. God with ye! Want of sweet water there shall not be, for the lake is our well; neither shall the bearers of burden hunger, or the least of the flock, for here is green pasture also. God with you all, my children! Go."

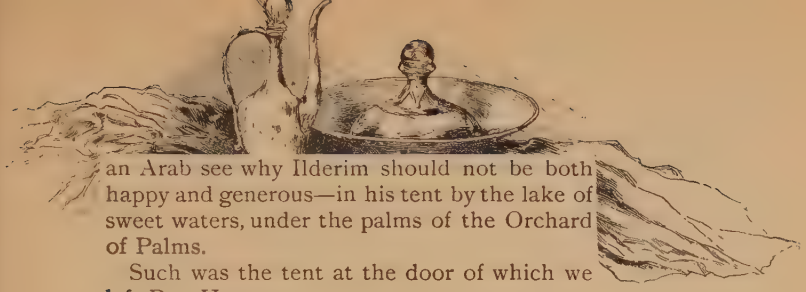
And, shouting, the many happy went their ways then to pitch their own habitations. A few remained to arrange the interior for the sheik; and of these the men-servants hung a curtain to the central row of pillars, making two apartments; the one on the right sacred to Ilderim himself, the other sacred to his horses—his jewels of Solomon—which they led



in, and with kisses and love-taps set at liberty. Against the middle pillar they then erected the arms-rack and filled it with javelins and spears, and bows, arrows, and shields; outside of them hanging the master's sword, modelled after the new moon; and the glitter of its blade rivalled the glitter of the jewels bedded in its grip. Upon one end of the rack they hung the housings of the horses, gay some of them as the livery of a king's servant, while on the other end they displayed the great man's wearing-apparel—his robes woollen and robes linen, his tunics and trousers, and many-colored kerchiefs for the head. Nor did they give over the work until he pronounced it well.

Meantime the women drew out and set up the divan, more indispensable to him than the beard down-flowing over his breast, white as Aaron's. They put a frame together in shape of three sides of a square, the opening to the door, and covered it with cushions and base curtains, and the cushions with a changeable spread striped brown and yellow; at the corners they placed pillows and bolsters sacked in cloth blue and crimson; then around the divan they laid a margin of carpet, and the inner space they carpeted as well; and when the carpet was carried from the opening of the divan to the door of the tent, their work was done; whereupon they again waited until the master said it was good. Nothing remained then but to bring and fill the jars with water, and hang the skin bottles of arrack ready for the hand—to-morrow the leben. Nor might





an Arab see why Ilderim should not be both happy and generous—in his tent by the lake of sweet waters, under the palms of the Orchard of Palms.

Such was the tent at the door of which we left Ben-Hur.

Servants were already waiting the master's direction. One of them took off his sandals; another unlatched Ben-Hur's Roman shoes; then the two exchanged their dusty outer garments for fresh ones of white linen.

"Enter—in God's name, enter, and take thy rest," said the host, heartily, in the dialect of the Market-place of Jerusalem; forthwith he led the way to the divan.

"I will sit here," he said next, pointing; "and there the stranger."

A woman—in the old time she would have been called a handmaid—answered, and dexterously piled the pillows and bolsters as rests for the back; after which they sat upon the side of the divan, while water was brought fresh from the lake, and their feet bathed and dried with napkins.

"We have a saying in the Desert," Ilderim began, gathering his beard, and combing it with his slender fingers, "that a good appetite is the promise of a long life. Hast thou such?"

"By that rule, good sheik, I will live a hundred years. I am a hungry wolf at thy door," Ben-Hur replied.

"Well, thou shalt not be sent away like a wolf. I will give thee the best of the flocks."

Ilderim clapped his hands.

"Seek the stranger in the guest-tent, and say I, Ilderim, send him a prayer that his peace may be as incessant as the flowing of waters."

The man in waiting bowed.

"Say, also," Ilderim continued, "that I have returned with another for breaking of bread; and, if Balthasar the wise careth to share the loaf, three may partake of it, and the portion of the birds be none the less."

The second servant went away.

"Let us take our rest now."

Thereupon Ilderim settled himself upon the divan, as at this day merchants sit on their rugs in the bazaars of Damascus; and when fairly at rest, he stopped combing his beard, and said, gravely, "That thou art my guest, and hast drunk my leben, and art about to taste my salt, ought not to forbid a question: Who art thou?"

"Sheik Ilderim," said Ben-Hur, calmly enduring his gaze, "I pray thee not to think me trifling with thy just demand; but was there never a time in thy life when to answer such a question would have been a crime to thyself?"

"By the splendor of Solomon, yes!" Ilderim answered. "Betrayal of self is at times as base as the betrayal of a tribe."

"Thanks, thanks, good sheik!" Ben-Hur exclaimed. "Never answer became thee better. Now I know thou dost but seek assurance to justify the trust I have come to ask, and that such assurance is of more interest to thee than the affairs of my poor life."

The sheik in his turn bowed, and Ben-Hur hastened to pursue his advantage.

"So it please thee then," he said, "first, I am not a Roman, as the name given thee as mine implieth."

Ilderim clasped the beard overflowing his breast, and gazed at the speaker with eyes faintly twinkling through the shade of the heavy, close-drawn brows.

"In the next place," Ben-Hur continued, "I am an Israelite of the tribe of Judah."

The sheik raised his brows a little.

"Nor that merely. Sheik, I am a Jew with a grievance against Rome compared with which thine is not more than a child's trouble."

The old man combed his beard with nervous haste, and let fall his brows until even the twinkle of the eyes went out.

"Still further: I swear to thee, Sheik Ilderim —I swear by the covenant the Lord made with my fathers—so thou but give me the revenge I seek, the money and the glory of the race shall be thine."

Ilderim's brows relaxed; his head arose; his face began to beam; and it was almost possible to see the satisfaction taking possession of him.

"Enough!" he said. "If at the roots of thy tongue there is a lie in coil, Solomon himself had not been safe against thee. That thou art not a Roman—that as a Jew thou hast a grievance against Rome, and revenge to compass, I believe; and on that score enough. But as to thy skill. What experience hast thou in racing with chariots? And the horses—canst

thou make them creatures of thy will?—to know thee? to come at call? to go, if thou sayest it, to the last extreme of breath and strength? and then, in the perishing moment, out of the depths of thy life thrill them to one exertion the mightiest of all? The gift, my son, is not to every one. Ah, by the splendor of God! I knew a king who governed millions of men, their perfect master, but could not win the respect of a horse. Mark! I speak not of the dull brutes whose round it is to slave for slaves—the debased in blood and image—the dead in spirit; but of such as mine here—the kings of their kind; of a lineage reaching back to the broods of the first Pharaoh; my comrades and friends, dwellers in tents, whom long association with me has brought up to my plane; who to their instincts have added our wits and to their senses joined our souls, until they feel all we know of ambition, love, hate, and contempt; in war, heroes; in trust, faithful as women. Ho, there!"

A servant came forward.

"Let my Arabs come!"

The man drew aside part of the division curtain of the tent, exposing to view a group of horses, which lingered a moment where they were as if to make certain of the invitation.

"Come!" Ilderim said to them. "Why stand ye there? What have I that is not yours? Come, I say!"

They stalked slowly in.

"Son of Israel," the master said, "thy Moses was a mighty man, but—ha, ha, ha!—I must

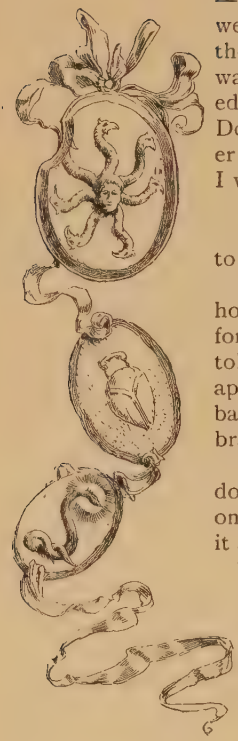
laugh when I think of his allowing thy fathers the plodding ox and the dull, slow-natured ass, and forbidding them property in horses. Ha, ha, ha! Thinkest thou he would have done so had he seen that one—and that—and this?" At the word he laid his hand upon the face of the first to reach him, and patted it with infinite pride and tenderness.

"It is a misjudgment, sheik, a misjudgment," Ben-Hur said, warmly. "Moses was a warrior as well as a law-giver beloved by God; and to follow war—ah, what is it but to love all its creatures—these among the rest?"

A head of exquisite turn—with large eyes, soft as a deer's, and half hidden by the dense forelock, and small ears, sharp-pointed and sloped well forward—approached then quite to his breast, the nostrils open, and the upper lip in motion. "Who are you?" it asked, plainly as ever man spoke. Ben-Hur recognized one of the four racers he had seen on the course, and gave his open hand to the beautiful brute.

"They will tell you, the blasphemers!—may their days shorten as they grow fewer!"—the sheik spoke with the feeling of a man repelling a personal defamation—"they will tell you, I say, that our horses of the best blood are derived from the Nesæan pastures of Persia. God gave the first Arab a measureless waste of sand, with some treeless mountains, and here and there a well of bitter waters; and said to him, 'Behold thy country!' And when the poor man complained, the Mighty One pitied

him, and said again, 'Be of cheer! for I will twice bless thee above other men.' The Arab heard, and gave thanks, and with faith set out to find the blessings. He travelled all the boundaries first, and failed; then he made a path into the desert, and went on and on—and in the heart of the waste there was an island of green very beautiful to see; and in the heart of the island, lo! a herd of camels, and another of horses! He took them joyfully and kept them with care for what they were —best gifts of God. And from that green isle went forth all the horses of the earth; even to the pastures of Nesæa they went; and northward to the dreadful vales perpetually threshed by blasts from the Sea of Chill Winds. Doubt not the story; or if thou dost, may never amulet have charm for an Arab again. Nay, I will give thee proof."



He clapped his hands.

"Bring me the records of the tribe," he said to the servant who responded.

While waiting, the sheik played with the horses, patting their cheeks, combing their forelocks with his fingers, giving each one a token of remembrance. Presently six men appeared with chests of cedar re-enforced by bands of brass, and hinged and bolted with brass.

"Nay," said Ilderim, when they were all set down by the divan, "I meant not all of them; only the records of the horses—that one. Open it and take back the others."

The chest was opened, disclosing a mass of

ivory tablets strung on rings of silver wire; and as the tablets were scarcely thicker than wafers, each ring held several hundreds of them.

"I know," said Ilderim, taking some of the rings in his hand—"I know with what care and zeal, my son, the scribes of the Temple in the Holy City keep the names of the newly born, that every son of Israel may trace his line of ancestry to its beginning, though it antedate the patriarchs. My fathers—may the recollection of them be green forever!—did not think it sinful to borrow the idea, and apply it to their dumb servants. See these tablets!"

Ben-Hur took the rings, and separating the tablets saw they bore rude hieroglyphs in Arabic burned on the smooth surface by a sharp point of heated metal.

"Canst thou read them, O son of Israel?"

"No. Thou must tell me their meaning."

"Know thou, then, each tablet records the name of a foal of the pure blood born to my fathers through the hundreds of years passed; and also the names of sire and dam. Take them, and note their age, that thou mayst the more readily believe."

Some of the tablets were nearly worn away. All were yellow with age.

"In the chest there, I can tell thee now, I have the perfect history; perfect because certified as history seldom is—showing of what stock all these are sprung—this one, and that now supplicating thy notice and caress; and as they come to us here, their sires, even the furthest removed in time, came to my sires,

under a tent-roof like this of mine, to eat their measure of barley from the open hand, and be talked to as children; and as children kiss the thanks they have not speech to express. And now, O son of Israel, thou mayst believe my declaration—if I am a lord of the Desert, behold my ministers! Take them from me, and I become as a sick man left by the caravan to die. Thanks to them, age hath not diminished the terror of me on the highways between cities; and it will not while I have strength to go with them. Ha, ha, ha! I could tell thee marvels done by their ancestors. In a favoring time I may do so; for the present, enough that they were never overtaken in retreat; nor, by the sword of Solomon, did they ever fail in pursuit! That, mark you, on the sands and under saddle; but now—I do not know—I am afraid, for they are under yoke the first time, and the conditions of success are so many. They have the pride and the speed and the endurance. If I find them a master, they will win. Son of Israel! so thou art the man, I swear it shall be a happy day that brought thee thither. Of thyself now speak."

"I know now," said Ben-Hur, "why it is that in the love of an Arab his horse is next to his children; and I know, also, why the Arab horses are the best in the world; but, good sheik, I would not have you judge me by words alone; for, as you know, all promises of men sometimes fail. Give me the trial first on some plain hereabout, and put the four in my hand to-morrow."

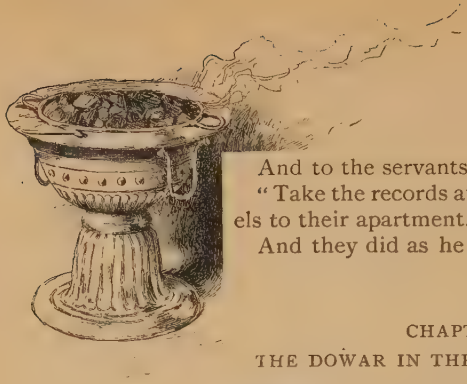
Ilderim's face beamed again, and he would have spoken.

"A moment, good sheik, a moment!" said Ben-Hur. "Let me say further. From the masters in Rome I learned many lessons, little thinking they would serve me in a time like this. I tell thee these thy sons of the Desert, though they have separately the speed of eagles and the endurance of lions, will fail if they are not trained to run together under the yoke. For bethink thee, sheik, in every four there is one the slowest and one the swiftest; and while the race is always to the slowest, the trouble is always with the swiftest. It was so to-day; the driver could not reduce the best to harmonious action with the poorest. My trial may have no better result; but if so, I will tell thee of it: that I swear. Wherefore, in the same spirit I say, can I get them to run together, moved by my will, the four as one, thou shalt have the sestertii and the crown, and I my revenge. What sayest thou?"

Ilderim listened, combing his beard the while. At the end he said, with a laugh, "I think better of thee, son of Israel. We have a saying in the Desert, 'If you will cook the meal with words, I will promise an ocean of butter.' Thou shalt have the horses in the morning."

At that moment there was a stir at the rear entrance to the tent.

"The supper—it is here! and yonder my friend Balthasar, whom thou shalt know. He hath a story to tell which an Israelite should never tire of hearing."



And to the servants he added,

"Take the records away, and return my jewels to their apartment."

And they did as he ordered.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DOWAR IN THE ORCHARD OF PALMS

IF the reader will return now to the repast of the wise men at their meeting in the desert, he will understand the preparations for the supper in Ilderim's tent. The differences were chiefly such as were incident to ampler means and better service.

Three rugs were spread on the carpet within the space so nearly enclosed by the divan; a table not more than a foot in height was brought and set within the same place, and covered with a cloth. Off to one side a portable earthenware oven was established under the presidency of a woman whose duty it was to keep the company in bread, or, more precisely, in hot cakes of flour from the handmills grinding with constant sound in a neighboring tent.

Meanwhile Balthasar was conducted to the divan, where Ilderim and Ben-Hur received him standing. A loose black gown covered his person; his step was feeble, and his whole movement slow and cautious, apparently dependent upon a long staff and the arm of a servant.

"Peace to you, my friend," said Ilderim, respectfully. "Peace and welcome."

The Egyptian raised his head and replied, "And to thee, good sheik—to thee and thine, peace and the blessing of the One God—God the true and loving."

The manner was gentle and devout, and impressed Ben-Hur with a feeling of awe; besides which the blessing included in the answering salutation had been partly addressed to him, and while that part was being spoken, the eyes of the aged guest, hollow yet luminous, rested upon his face long enough to stir an emotion new and mysterious, and so strong that he again and again during the repast scanned the much-wrinkled and bloodless face for its meaning; but always there was the expression bland, placid, and trustful as a child's. A little later he found that expression habitual.

"This is he, O Balthasar," said the sheik, laying his hand on Ben-Hur's arm, "who will break bread with us this evening."

The Egyptian glanced at the young man, and looked again surprised and doubting; seeing which the sheik continued, "I have promised him my horses for trial to-morrow; and if all goes well, he will drive them in the Circus."

Balthasar continued his gaze.

"He came well recommended," Ilderim pursued, much puzzled. "You may know him as the son of Arrius, who was a noble Roman sailor, though"—the sheik hesitated, then resumed, with a laugh—"though he declares

himself an Israelite of the tribe of Judah; and, by the splendor of God, I believe that he tells me!"

Balthasar could no longer withhold explanation.

"To-day, O most generous sheik, my life was in peril, and would have been lost had not a youth, the counterpart of this one — if, indeed, he be not the very same — intervened when all others fled, and saved me." Then he addressed Ben-Hur directly, "Art thou not he?"

"I cannot answer so far," Ben-Hur replied, with modest deference. "I am he who stopped the horses of the insolent Roman when they were rushing upon thy camel at the Fountain of Castalia. Thy daughter left a cup with me."

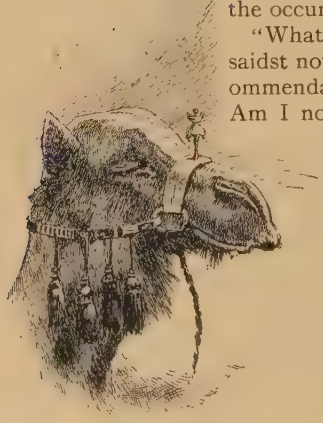
From the bosom of his tunic he produced the cup and gave it to Balthasar.

A glow lighted the faded countenance of the Egyptian.

"The Lord sent thee to me at the Fountain to-day," he said, in a tremulous voice, stretching his hand towards Ben-Hur; "and he sends thee to me now. I give him thanks; and praise him thou, for of his favor I have wherewith to give thee great reward, and I will. The cup is thine; keep it."

Ben-Hur took back the gift, and Balthasar, seeing the inquiry upon Ilderim's face, related the occurrence at the Fountain.

"What!" said the sheik to Ben-Hur. "Thou saidst nothing of this to me, when better recommendation thou couldst not have brought. Am I not an Arab, and sheik of my tribe of



tens of thousands? And is not he my guest? And is it not in my guest-bond that the good or evil thou dost him is good or evil done to me? Whither shouldst thou go for reward but here? And whose the hand to give it but mine?"

His voice at the end of the speech rose to cutting shrillness.

"Good sheik, spare me, I pray. I came not for reward, great or small; and that I may be acquitted of the thought, I say the help I gave this excellent man would have been given as well to thy humblest servant."

"But he is my friend, my guest—not my servant; and seest thou not in the difference the favor of Fortune?" Then to Balthasar the sheik subjoined, "Ah, by the splendor of God! I tell thee again he is not a Roman."

With that he turned away, and gave attention to the servants, whose preparations for the supper were about complete.

The reader who recollects the history of Balthasar as given by himself at the meeting in the desert will understand the effect of Ben-Hur's assertion of disinterestedness upon that worthy. In his devotion to men there had been, it will be remembered, no distinctions; while the redemption which had been promised him in the way of reward—the redemption for which he was waiting—was universal. To him, therefore, the assertion sounded somewhat like an echo of himself. He took a step nearer Ben-Hur, and spoke to him in the childlike way.

"How did the sheik say I should call you? It was a Roman name, I think."

"Arrius, the son of Arrius."

"Yet thou art not a Roman?"

"All my people were Jews."

"Were, saidst thou? Are they not living?"

The question was subtle as well as simple; but Ilderim saved Ben-Hur from reply.

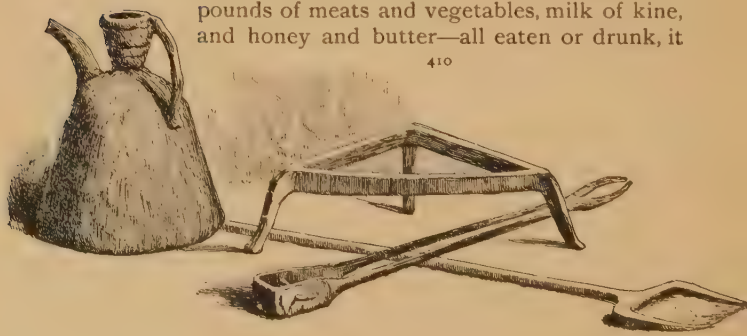
"Come," he said to them, "the meal is ready."

Ben-Hur gave his arm to Balthasar and conducted him to the table, where shortly they were all seated on their rugs Eastern fashion. The lavers were brought them, and they washed and dried their hands; then the sheik made a sign, the servants stopped, and the voice of the Egyptian arose tremulous with holy feeling.

"Father of All—God! What we have is of thee; take our thanks, and bless us, that we may continue to do thy will."

It was the grace the good man had said simultaneously with his brethren Gaspar the Greek and Melchior the Hindoo, the utterance in diverse tongues out of which had come the miracle attesting the Divine Presence at the meal in the desert years before.

The table to which they immediately addressed themselves was, as may be thought, rich in the substantials and delicacies favorite in the East—in cakes hot from the oven, vegetables from the gardens, meats singly, compounds of meats and vegetables, milk of kine, and honey and butter—all eaten or drunk, it



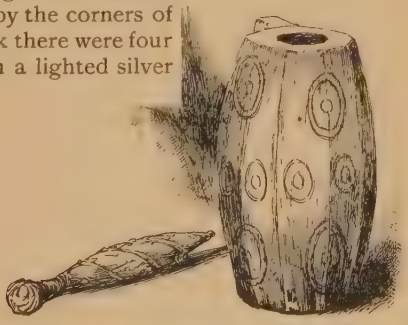
should be remarked, without any of the modern accessories—knives, forks, spoons, cups, or plates; and in this part of the repast but little was said, for they were hungry. But when the dessert was in course it was otherwise. They laved their hands again, had the lap-cloths shaken out, and with a renewed table and the sharp edge of their appetites gone they were disposed to talk and listen.

With such a company—an Arab, a Jew, and an Egyptian, all believers alike in one God—there could be at that age but one subject of conversation; and of the three, which should be speaker but he to whom the Deity had been so nearly a personal appearance, who had seen him in a star, had heard his voice in direction, had been led so far and so miraculously by his Spirit? And of what should he talk but that of which he had been called to testify?

CHAPTER XV

BALTHASAR IMPRESSES BEN-HUR

THE shadows cast over the Orchard of Palms by the mountains at set of sun left no sweet margin time of violet sky and drowsing earth between the day and night. The latter came early and swift; and against its glooming in the tent this evening the servants brought four candlesticks of brass and set them by the corners of the table. To each candlestick there were four branches, and on each branch a lighted silver



lamp and a supply cup of olive-oil. In light ample, even brilliant, the group at dessert continued their conversation, speaking in the Syriac dialect, familiar to all peoples in that part of the world.

The Egyptian told his story of the meeting of the three in the desert, and agreed with the sheik that it was in December, twenty-seven years before, when he and his companions, fleeing from Herod, arrived at the tent praying shelter. The narrative was heard with intense interest; even the servants lingering when they could to catch its details. Ben-Hur received it as became a man listening to a revelation of deep concern to all humanity, and to none of more concern than the people of Israel. In his mind, as we shall presently see, there was crystallizing an idea which was to change his course of life, if not absorb it absolutely.

As the recital proceeded, the impression made by Balthasar upon the young Jew increased; at its conclusion, his feeling was too profound to permit a doubt of its truth; indeed, there was nothing left him desirable in the connection but assurances, if such were to be had, pertaining exclusively to the consequences of the amazing event.

And now there is wanting an explanation which the very discerning may have heretofore demanded; certainly it can be no longer delayed. Our tale begins, in point of date not less than fact, to trench close upon the opening of the ministry of the Son of Mary, whom

we have seen but once since this same Balthasar left him worshipfully in his mother's lap in the cave by Bethlehem. Henceforth to the end the mysterious Child will be a subject of continual reference; and slowly though surely the current of events with which we are dealing will bring us nearer and nearer to him, until finally we see him a man—we would like, if armed contrariety of opinion would permit it, to add—A MAN WHOM THE WORLD COULD NOT DO WITHOUT. Of this declaration, apparently so simple, a shrewd mind inspired by faith will make much—and in welcome. Before his time, and since, there have been men indispensable to particular people and periods; but his indispensability was to the whole race, and for all time—a respect in which it is unique, solitary, divine.

To Sheik Ilderim the story was not new. He had heard it from the three wise men together under circumstances which left no room for doubt; he had acted upon it seriously, for the helping a fugitive escape from the anger of the first Herod was dangerous. Now one of the three sat at his table again, a welcome guest and revered friend. Sheik Ilderim certainly believed the story; yet, in the nature of things, its mighty central fact could not come home to him with the force and absorbing effect it came to Ben-Hur. He was an Arab, whose interest in the consequences was but general; on the other hand, Ben-Hur was an Israelite and a Jew, with more than a special interest in—if the solecism can be pardoned—the truth

of the fact. He laid hold of the circumstance with a purely Jewish mind.

From his cradle, let it be remembered, he had heard of the Messiah; at the colleges he had been made familiar with all that was known of that Being at once the hope, the fear, and the peculiar glory of the chosen people; the prophets from the first to the last of the heroic line foretold him; and the coming had been, and yet was, the theme of endless exposition with the rabbis — in the synagogues, in the schools, in the Temple, of fast-days and feast-days, in public and in private, the national teachers expounded and kept expounding until all the children of Abraham, wherever their lots were cast, bore the Messiah in expectation, and by it literally, and with iron severity, ruled and moulded their lives.

Doubtless, it will be understood from this that there was much argument among the Jews themselves about the Messiah, and so there was; but the disputation was all limited to one point, and one only—when would he come?

Disquisition is for the preacher; whereas the writer is but telling a tale, and that he may not lose his character, the explanation he is making requires notice merely of a point connected with the Messiah about which the unanimity among the chosen people was matter of marvellous astonishment; he was to be, when come, the KING OF THE JEWS—their political King, their Cæsar. By their instrumentality he was to make armed conquest of the earth, and then, for their profit and in the

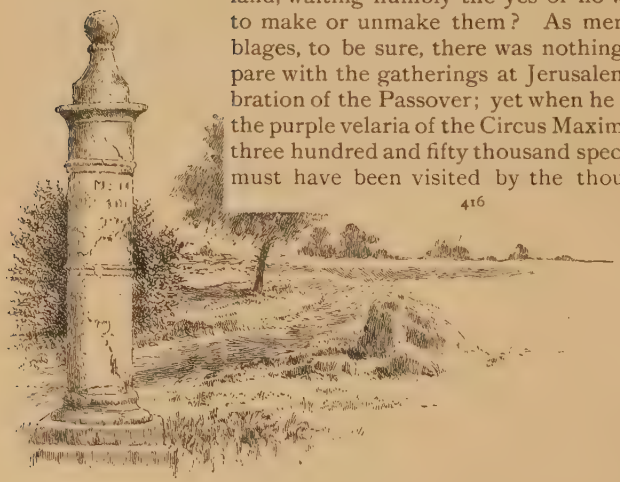
name of God, hold it down forever. On this faith, dear reader, the Pharisees or Separatists —the latter being rather a political term—in the cloisters and around the altars of the Temple, built an edifice of hope far overtopping the dream of the Macedonian. His but covered the earth; theirs covered the earth and filled the skies; that is to say, in their bold, boundless fantasy of blasphemous egotism, God the Almighty was in effect to suffer them for their uses to nail him by the ear to a door in sign of eternal servitude.

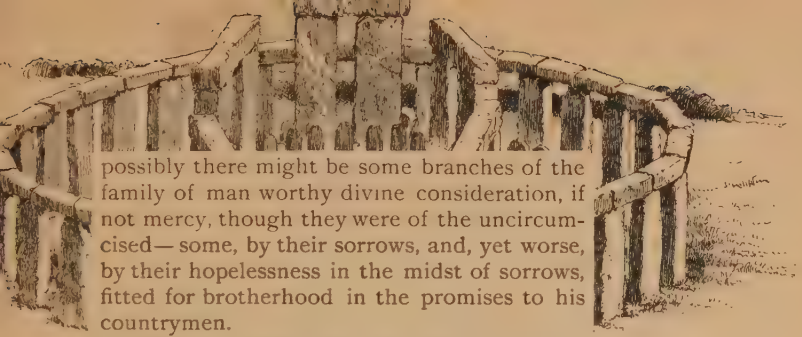
Returning directly to Ben-Hur, it is to be observed now that there were two circumstances in his life the result of which had been to keep him in a state comparatively free from the influence and hard effects of the audacious faith of his Separatist countrymen.

In the first place, his father followed the faith of the Sadducees, who may, in a general way, be termed the Liberals of their time. They had some loose opinions in denial of the soul. They were strict constructionists and rigorous observers of the Law as found in the books of Moses; but they held the vast mass of Rabbinical addenda to those books in derisive contempt. They were unquestionably a sect, yet their religion was more a philosophy than a creed; they did not deny themselves the enjoyments of life, and saw many admirable methods and productions among the Gentile divisions of the race. In politics they were the active opposition of the Separatists. In the natural order of things, these circumstances

and conditions, opinions and peculiarities, would have descended to the son as certainly and really as any portion of his father's estate; and, as we have seen, he was actually in course of acquiring them when the second saving event overtook him.

Upon a youth of Ben-Hur's mind and temperament the influence of five years of affluent life in Rome can be appreciated best by recalling that the great city was then, in fact, the meeting-place of the nations — their meeting-place politically and commercially, as well as for the indulgence of pleasure without restraint. Round and round the golden mile-stone in front of the Forum—now in gloom of eclipse, now in unapproachable splendor — flowed all the active currents of humanity. If excellences of manner, refinements of society, attainments of intellect, and glory of achievement made no impression upon him, how could he, as the son of Arrius, pass day after day, through a period so long, from the beautiful villa near Misenum into the receptions of Cæsar, and be wholly uninfluenced by what he saw there of kings, princes, ambassadors, hostages, and delegates, suitors all of them from every known land, waiting humbly the yes or no which was to make or unmake them? As mere assemblages, to be sure, there was nothing to compare with the gatherings at Jerusalem in celebration of the Passover; yet when he sat under the purple velaria of the Circus Maximus one of three hundred and fifty thousand spectators, he must have been visited by the thought that



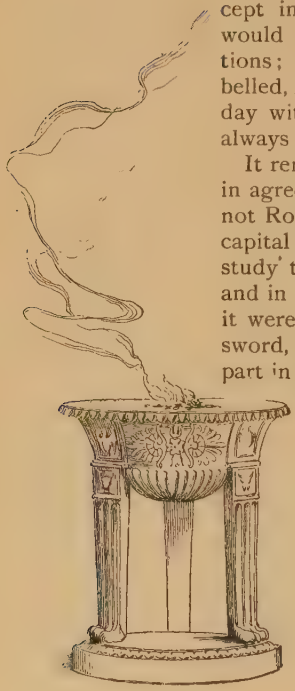


possibly there might be some branches of the family of man worthy divine consideration, if not mercy, though they were of the uncircumcised— some, by their sorrows, and, yet worse, by their hopelessness in the midst of sorrows, fitted for brotherhood in the promises to his countrymen.

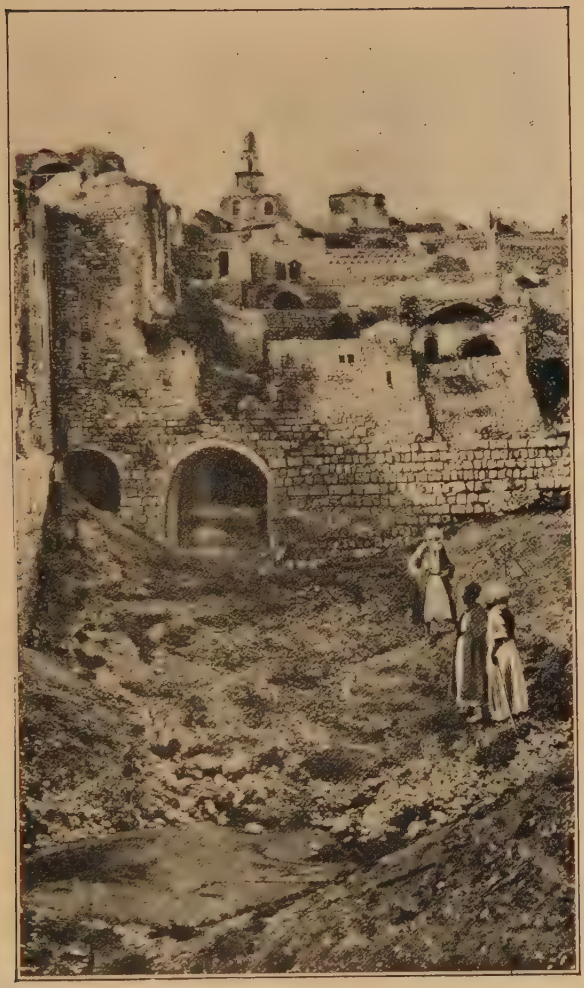
That he should have had such a thought under such circumstances was but natural; we think so much, at least, will be admitted; but when the reflection came to him, and he gave himself up to it, he could not have been blind to a certain distinction. The wretchedness of the masses, and their hopeless condition, had no relation whatever to religion; their murmurs and groans were not against their gods or for want of gods. In the oak-woods of Britain the Druids held their followers; Odin and Freya maintained their godships in Gaul and Germany and among the Hyperboreans; Egypt was satisfied with her crocodiles and Anubis; the Persians were yet devoted to Ormuzd and Ahriman, holding them in equal honor; in hope of the Nirvana, the Hindoos moved on patient as ever in the rayless paths of Brahm; the beautiful Greek mind, in pauses of philosophy, still sang the heroic gods of Homer; while in Rome nothing was so common and cheap as gods. According to whim, the masters of the world, because they were masters, carried their worship and offerings indifferently from altar to altar, delighted in the pandemonium they had erected. Their discontent, if they were discontented, was with the

number of gods; for, after borrowing all the divinities of the earth, they proceeded to deify their Cæsars, and vote them altars and holy service. No, the unhappy condition was not from religion, but misgovernment and usurpations and countless tyrannies. The Avernus men had been tumbled into, and were praying to be relieved from, was terribly but essentially political. The supplication—everywhere alike, in Lodinum, Alexandria, Athens, Jerusalem—was for a king to conquer with, not a god to worship.

Studying the situation after two thousand years, we can see and say that religiously there was no relief from the universal confusion except some God could prove himself a true God, and a masterful one, and come to the rescue; but the people of the time, even the discerning and philosophical, discovered no hope except in crushing Rome; that done, the relief would follow in restorations and reorganizations; therefore they prayed, conspired, rebelled, fought, and died, drenching the soil today with blood, to-morrow with tears—and always with the same result.



It remains to be said now that Ben-Hur was in agreement with the mass of men of his time not Romans. The five years' residence in the capital served him with opportunity to see and study the miseries of the subjugated world; and in full belief that the evils which afflicted it were political, and to be cured only by the sword, he was going forth to fit himself for a part in the day of resort to the heroic remedy.



POOL OF BETHSEDA

By practice of arms he was a perfect soldier; but war has its higher fields, and he who would move successfully in them must know more than to defend with shield and thrust with spear. In those fields the general finds his tasks, the greatest of which is the reduction of the many into one, and that one himself; the consummate captain is a fighting-man armed with an army. This conception entered into the scheme of life to which he was further swayed by the reflection that the vengeance he dreamed of, in connection with his individual wrongs, would be more surely found in some of the ways of war than in any pursuit of peace.

The feelings with which he listened to Balthasar can be now understood. The story touched two of the most sensitive points of his being so they rang within him. His heart beat fast—and faster still when, searching himself, he found not a doubt either that the recital was true in every particular, or that the Child so miraculously found was the Messiah. Marvelling much that Israel rested so dead to the revelation, and that he had never heard of it before that day, two questions presented themselves to him as centring all it was at that moment further desirable to know:

Where was the Child then?

And what was his mission?

With apologies for the interruptions, he proceeded to draw out the opinions of Balthasar, who was in nowise loath to speak.

CHAPTER XVI

CHRIST IS COMING—BALTHASAR

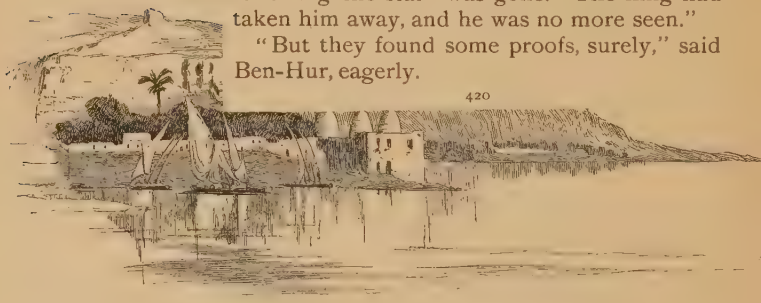
"IF I could answer you," Balthasar said, in his simple, earnest, devout way —"oh, if I knew where he is, how quickly I would go to him! The seas should not stay me, nor the mountains."

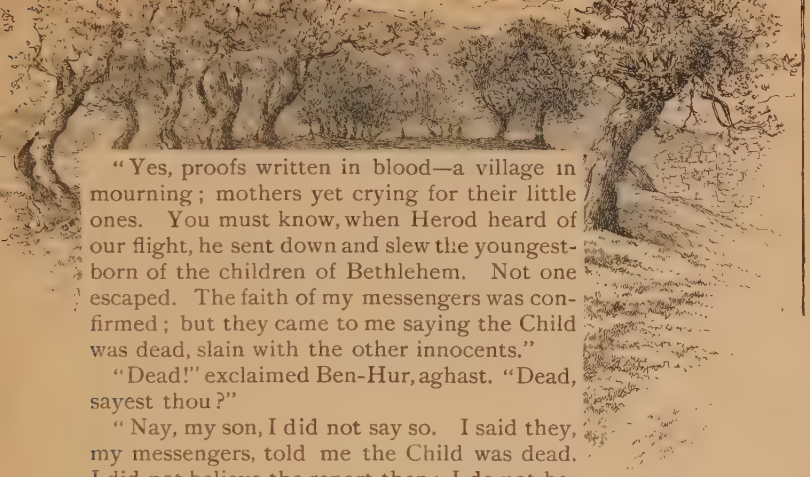
"You have tried to find him, then?" asked Ben-Hur.

A smile flitted across the face of the Egyptian.

"The first task I charged myself with after leaving the shelter given me in the desert"—Balthasar cast a grateful look at Ilderim—"was to learn what became of the Child. But a year had passed, and I dared not go up to Judea in person, for Herod still held the throne bloody-minded as ever. In Egypt, upon my return, there were a few friends to believe the wonderful things I told them of what I had seen and heard—a few who rejoiced with me that a Redeemer was born—a few who never tired of the story. Some of them came up for me looking after the Child. They went first to Bethlehem, and found there the khan and the cave; but the steward—he who sat at the gate the night of the birth, and the night we came following the star—was gone. The king had taken him away, and he was no more seen."

"But they found some proofs, surely," said Ben-Hur, eagerly.





"Yes, proofs written in blood—a village in mourning; mothers yet crying for their little ones. You must know, when Herod heard of our flight, he sent down and slew the youngest-born of the children of Bethlehem. Not one escaped. The faith of my messengers was confirmed; but they came to me saying the Child was dead, slain with the other innocents."

"Dead!" exclaimed Ben-Hur, aghast. "Dead, sayest thou?"

"Nay, my son, I did not say so. I said they, my messengers, told me the Child was dead. I did not believe the report then; I do not believe it now."

"I see—thou hast some special knowledge."

"Not so, not so," said Balthasar, dropping his gaze. "The Spirit was to go with us no farther than to the Child. When we came out of the cave, after our presents were given and we had seen the babe, we looked first thing for the star; but it was gone, and we knew we were left to ourselves. The last inspiration of the Holy One — the last I can recall — was that which sent us to Ilderim for safety."

"Yes," said the sheik, fingering his beard nervously. "You told me you were sent to me by a Spirit—I remember it."

"I have no special knowledge," Balthasar continued, observing the dejection which had fallen upon Ben-Hur; "but, my son, I have given the matter much thought—thought continuing through years, inspired by faith, which, I assure you, calling God for witness, is as strong in me now as in the hour I heard the

voice of the Spirit calling me by the shore of the lake. If you will listen, I will tell you why I believe the Child is living."

Both Ilderim and Ben-Hur looked assent, and appeared to summon their faculties that they might understand as well as hear. The interest reached the servants, who drew near to the divan, and stood listening. Throughout the tent there was the profoundest silence.

"We three believe in God."

Balthasar bowed his head as he spoke.

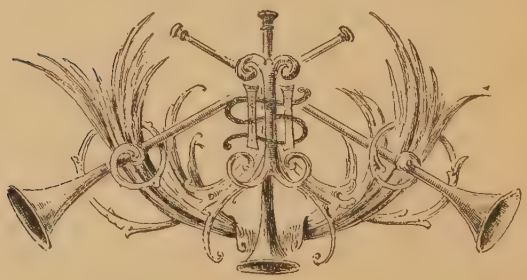
"And he is the Truth," he resumed. "His word is God. The hills may turn to dust, and the seas be drunk dry by south winds; but his word shall stand, because it is the Truth."

The utterance was in a manner inexpressibly solemn.

"The voice, which was his, speaking to me by the lake, said, 'Blessed art thou, O son of Mizraim! The Redemption cometh. With two others from the remotenesses of the earth, thou shalt see the Saviour.' I have seen the Saviour — blessed be his name! — but the Redemption, which was the second part of the promise, is yet to come. Seest thou now? If the Child be dead, there is no agent to bring the Redemption about, and the word is naught, and God — nay, I dare not say it!"

He threw up both hands in horror.

"The Redemption was the work for which the Child was born; and so long as the promise abides, not even death can separate him from his work until it is fulfilled, or at least in the way of fulfilment. Take you that now as one



reason for my belief; then give me further attention."

The good man paused.

"Wilt thou not taste the wine? It is at thy hand—see," said Ilderim, respectfully.

Balthasar drank, and, seeming refreshed, continued:

"The Saviour I saw was born of woman, in nature like us, and subject to all our ills—even death. Let that stand as the first proposition. Consider next the work set apart to him. Was it not a performance for which only a man is fitted?—a man wise, firm, discreet—a man, not a child? To become such he had to grow as we grow. Bethink you now of the dangers his life was subject to in the interval—the long interval between childhood and maturity. The existing powers were his enemies; Herod was his enemy; and what would Rome have been? And as for Israel—that he should not be accepted by Israel was the motive for cutting him off. See you now. What better way was there to take care of his life in the helpless growing time than by passing him into obscurity? Wherefore I say to myself, and to my listening faith, which is never moved except by yearning of love—I say he is not dead, but lost; and, his work remaining undone, he will come again. There you have the reasons for my belief. Are they not good?"

Ilderim's small Arab eyes were bright with understanding, and Ben-Hur, lifted from his dejection, said heartily, "I, at least, may not gainsay them. What further, pray?"

"Hast thou not enough, my son? Well," he began, in calmer tone, "seeing that the reasons were good—more plainly, seeing it was God's will that the Child should not be found—I settled my faith into the keeping of patience, and took to waiting." He raised his eyes, full of holy trust, and broke off abstractedly—"I am waiting now. He lives, keeping well his mighty secret. What though I cannot go to him, or name the hill or the vale of his abiding-place? He lives—it may be as the fruit in blossom, it may be as the fruit just ripening; but by the certainty there is in the promise and reason of God, I know he lives."

A thrill of awe struck Ben-Hur—a thrill which was but the dying of his half-formed doubt.

"Where thinkest thou he is?" he asked, in a low voice, and hesitating, like one who feels upon his lips the pressure of a sacred silence.

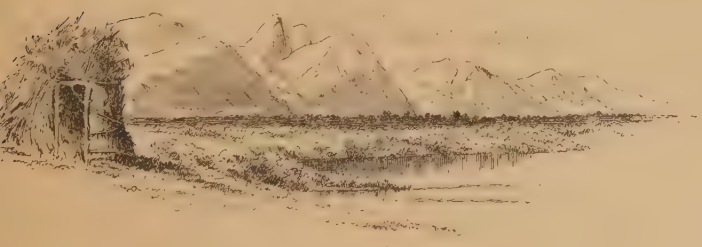
Balthasar looked at him kindly, and replied, his mind not entirely freed from its abstraction,

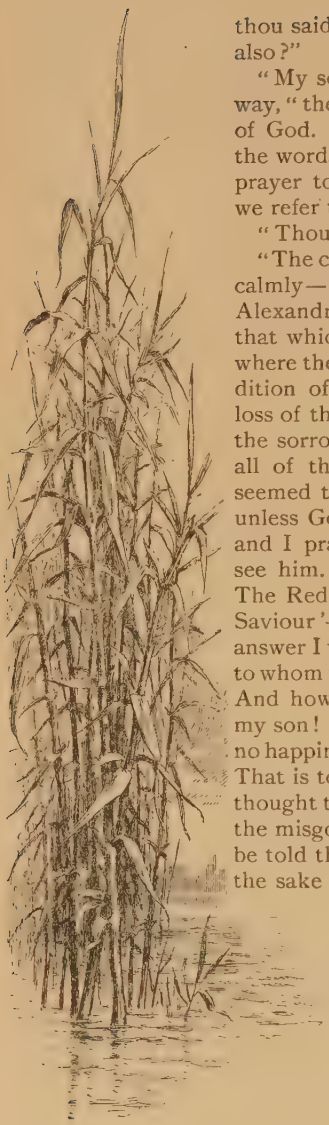
"In my house on the Nile, so close to the river that the passers-by in boats see it and its reflection in the water at the same time—in my house, a few weeks ago, I sat thinking. A man thirty years old, I said to myself, should have his fields of life all ploughed, and his planting well done; for after that it is summer-time, with space scarce enough to ripen his sowing. The Child, I said further, is now twenty-seven—his time to plant must be at hand. I asked myself, as you here asked me, my son, and answered by coming hither, as to

a good resting-place close by the land thy fathers had from God. Where else should he appear, if not in Judea? In what city should he begin his work if not in Jerusalem? Who should be first to receive the blessings he is to bring, if not the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; in love, at least, the children of the Lord? If I were bidden go seek him, I would search well the hamlets and villages on the slopes of the mountains of Judea and Galilee falling eastwardly into the valley of the Jordan. He is there now. Standing in a door or on a hill-top, only this evening he saw the sun set one day nearer the time when he himself shall become the light of the world."

Balthasar ceased, with his hand raised and finger pointing as if at Judea. All the listeners, even the dull servants outside the divan, affected by his fervor, were startled as if by a majestic presence suddenly apparent within the tent. Nor did the sensation die away at once: of those at the table, each sat awhile thinking. The spell was finally broken by Ben-Hur.

"I see, good Balthasar," he said, "that thou hast been much and strangely favored. I see, also, that thou art a wise man indeed. It is not in my power to tell how grateful I am for the things thou hast told me. I am warned of the coming of great events, and borrow somewhat from thy faith. Complete the obligation, I pray thee, by telling further of the mission of him for whom thou art waiting, and for whom from this night I too shall wait as becomes a believing son of Judah. He is to be a Saviour,



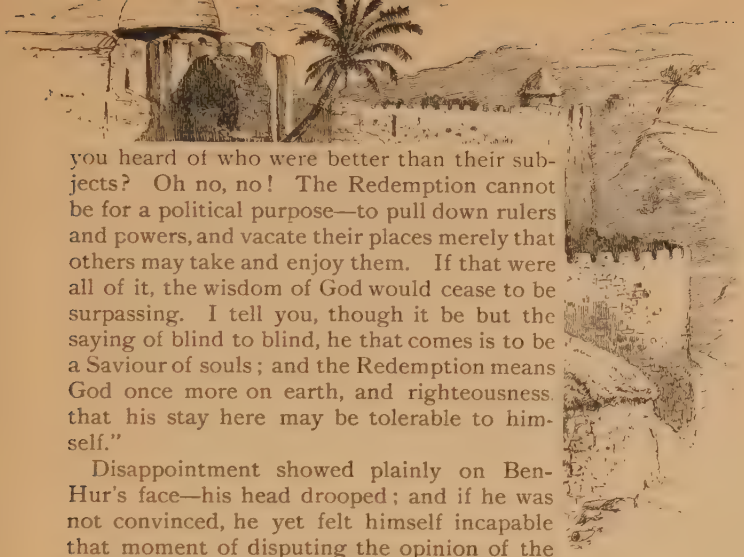


thou saidst; is he not to be King of the Jews also?"

"My son," said Balthasar, in his benignant way, "the mission is yet a purpose in the bosom of God. All I think about it is wrung from the words of the Voice in connection with the prayer to which they were in answer. Shall we refer to them again?"

"Thou art the teacher."

"The cause of my disquiet," Balthasar began, calmly—"that which made me a preacher in Alexandria and in the villages of the Nile; that which drove me at last into the solitude where the Spirit found me—was the fallen condition of men, occasioned, as I believed, by loss of the knowledge of God. I sorrowed for the sorrows of my kind—not of one class, but all of them. So utterly were they fallen it seemed to me there could be no Redemption unless God himself would make it his work; and I prayed him to come, and that I might see him. 'Thy good works have conquered. The Redemption cometh; thou shalt see the Saviour'—thus the Voice spake; and with the answer I went up to Jerusalem rejoicing. Now, to whom is the Redemption? To all the world. And how shall it be? Strengthen thy faith, my son! Men say, I know, that there will be no happiness until Rome is razed from her hills. That is to say, the ills of the time are not, as I thought them, from ignorance of God, but from the misgovernment of rulers. Do we need to be told that human governments are never for the sake of religion? How many kings have



you heard of who were better than their subjects? Oh no, no! The Redemption cannot be for a political purpose—to pull down rulers and powers, and vacate their places merely that others may take and enjoy them. If that were all of it, the wisdom of God would cease to be surpassing. I tell you, though it be but the saying of blind to blind, he that comes is to be a Saviour of souls; and the Redemption means God once more on earth, and righteousness that his stay here may be tolerable to himself."

Disappointment showed plainly on Ben-Hur's face—his head drooped; and if he was not convinced, he yet felt himself incapable that moment of disputing the opinion of the Egyptian. Not so Ilderim.

"By the splendor of God!" he cried, impulsively, "the judgment does away with all custom. The ways of the world are fixed, and cannot be changed. There must be a leader in every community clothed with power, else there is no reform."

Balthasar received the burst gravely.

"Thy wisdom, good sheik, is of the world; and thou dost forget that it is from the ways of the world we are to be redeemed. Man as a subject is the ambition of a king; the soul of a man for its salvation is the desire of a God."

Ilderim, though silenced, shook his head, unwilling to believe. Ben-Hur took up the argument for him.

"Father—I call thee such by permission,"

he said—"for whom wert thou required to ask at the gates of Jerusalem?"

The sheik threw him a grateful look.

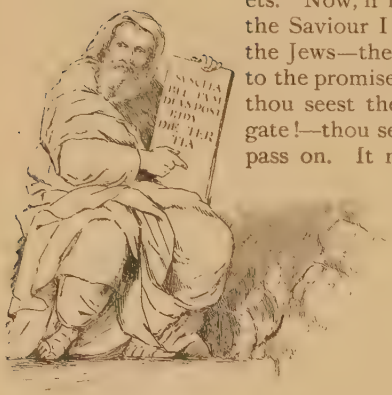
"I was to ask of the people," said Balthasar, quietly, "where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

"And you saw him in the cave by Bethlehem?"

"We saw and worshipped him, and gave him presents — Melchior, gold; Gaspar, frankincense; and I, myrrh."

"When thou dost speak of fact, O father, to hear thee is to believe," said Ben-Hur; "but in the matter of opinion, I cannot understand the kind of king thou wouldst make of the Child —I cannot separate the ruler from his powers and duties."

"Son," said Balthasar, "we have the habit of studying closely the things which chance to lie at our feet, giving but a look at the greater objects in the distance. Thou seest now but the title — King of the Jews; wilt thou lift thine eyes to the mystery beyond it, the stumbling-block will disappear. Of the title, a word. Thy Israel hath seen better days—days in which God called thy people endearingly his people, and dealt with them through prophets. Now, if in those days he promised them the Saviour I saw—promised him as King of the Jews—the appearance must be according to the promise, if only for the word's sake. Ah, thou seest the reason of my question at the gate!—thou seest, and I will no more of it, but pass on. It may be, next, thou art regarding



the dignity of the Child; if so, bethink thee—what is it to be a successor of Herod?—by the world's standard of honor, what? Could not God better by his beloved? If thou canst think of the Almighty Father in want of a title, and stooping to borrow the inventions of men, why was I not bidden ask for a Cæsar at once? Oh, for the substance of that whereof we speak, look higher, I pray thee! Ask rather of what he whom we await shall be king; for I do tell, my son, that is the key to the mystery, which no man shall understand without the key."

Balthasar raised his eyes devoutly.

"There is a kingdom on the earth, though it is not of it—a kingdom of wider bounds than the earth—wider than the sea and the earth, though they were rolled together as finest gold and spread by the beating of hammers. Its existence is a fact as our hearts are facts, and we journey through it from birth to death without seeing it; nor shall any man see it until he hath first known his own soul; for the kingdom is not for him, but for his soul. And in its dominion there is glory such as hath not entered imagination—original, incomparable, impossible of increase."

"What thou sayest, father, is a riddle to me," said Ben-Hur. "I never heard of such a kingdom."

"Nor did I," said Ilderim.

"And I may not tell more of it," Balthasar added, humbly dropping his eyes. "What it is, what it is for, how it may be reached, none

can know until the Child comes to take possession of it as his own. He brings the key of the viewless gate, which he will open for his beloved, among whom will be all who love him, for of such only the redeemed will be."

After that there was a long silence, which Balthasar accepted as the end of the conversation.

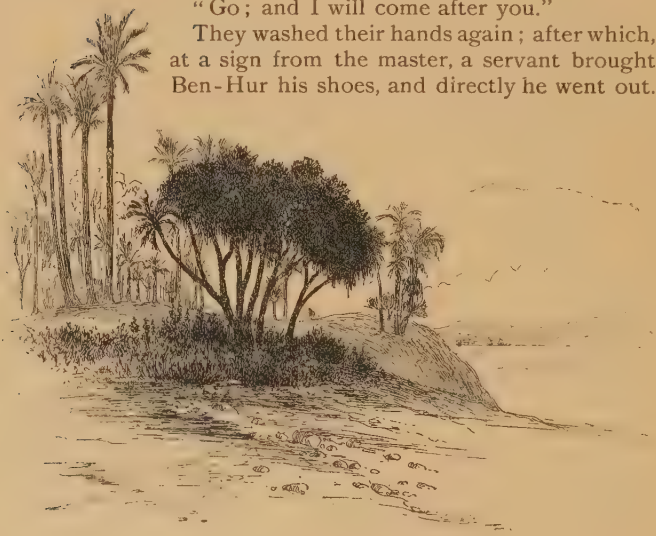
"Good sheik," he said, in his placid way, "to-morrow or the next day I will go up to the city for a time. My daughter wishes to see the preparations for the games. I will speak further about the time of our going. And, my son, I will see you again. To you both, peace and good-night."

They all arose from the table. The sheik and Ben-Hur remained looking after the Egyptian until he was conducted out of the tent.

"Sheik Ilderim," said Ben-Hur then, "I have heard strange things to-night. Give me leave, I pray, to walk by the lake that I may think of them."

"Go; and I will come after you."

They washed their hands again; after which, at a sign from the master, a servant brought Ben-Hur his shoes, and directly he went out.



CHAPTER XVII

THE KINGDOM—SPIRITUAL OR POLITICAL?

UP a little way from the dowar there was a cluster of palms which threw its shade half in the water, half on the land. A bulbul sang from the branches a song of invitation. Ben-Hur stopped beneath to listen. At any other time the notes of the bird would have driven thought away; but the story of the Egyptian was a burden of wonder, and he was a laborer carrying it, and, like other laborers, there was to him no music in the sweetest music until mind and body were happily attuned by rest.

The night was quiet. Not a ripple broke upon the shore. The old stars of the old East were all out, each in its accustomed place; and there was summer everywhere — on land, on lake, in the sky.

Ben-Hur's imagination was heated, his feelings aroused, his will all unsettled.

So the palms, the sky, the air, seemed to him of the far south zone into which Balthasar had been driven by despair for men; the lake, with its motionless surface, was a suggestion of the Nilotic mother by which the good man stood praying when the Spirit made its radiant appearance. Had all these accessories of the miracle come to Ben-Hur? or had he been transferred to them? And what if the miracle

should be repeated—and to him? He feared, yet wished, and even waited for the vision. When at last his feverish mood was cooled, permitting him to become himself, he was able to think.

His scheme of life has been explained. In all reflection about it heretofore there had been one hiatus which he had not been able to bridge or fill up—one so broad he could see but vaguely to the other side of it. When, finally, he was graduated a captain as well as a soldier, to what object should he address his efforts? Revolution he contemplated, of course; but the processes of revolution have always been the same, and to lead men into them there have always been required, first, a cause or pretence to enlist adherents; second, an end, or something as a practical achievement. As a rule he fights well who has wrongs to redress; but vastly better fights he who, with wrongs as a spur, has also steadily before him a glorious result in prospect—a result in which he can discern balm for wounds, compensation for valor, remembrance and gratitude in the event of death.

To determine the sufficiency of either the cause or the end, it was needful that Ben-Hur should study the adherents to whom he looked when all was ready for action. Very naturally, they were his countrymen. The wrongs of Israel were to every son of Abraham, and each one was a cause vastly holy, vastly inspiring.

Aye, the cause was there; but the end—what should it be?

The hours and days he had given this branch of his scheme were past calculation—all with the same conclusion—a dim, uncertain, general idea of national liberty. Was it sufficient? He could not say no, for that would have been the death of his hope; he shrank from saying yes, because his judgment taught him better. He could not assure himself even that Israel was able single-handed to successfully combat Rome. He knew the resources of that great enemy; he knew her art was superior to her resources. A universal alliance might suffice, but, alas! that was impossible, except—and upon the exception how long and earnestly he had dwelt!—except a hero would come from one of the suffering nations, and by martial successes accomplish a renown to fill the whole earth. What glory to Judea could she prove the Macedonia of the new Alexander! Alas, again! Under the rabbis valor was possible, but not discipline. And then the taunt of Messala in the garden of Herod—"All you conquer in the six days, you lose on the seventh."

So it happened he never approached the chasm thinking to surmount it but he was beaten back; and so incessantly had he failed in the object that he had about given it over, except as a thing of chance. The hero might be discovered in his day or he might not. God only knew. Such his state of mind, there need be no lingering upon the effect of Malluch's skeleton recital of the story of Balthasar. He heard it with a bewildering satisfaction—a feeling that here was the solution of the trouble—

here was the requisite hero found at last; and he a son of the Lion tribe, and King of the Jews! Behind the hero, lo! the world in arms.

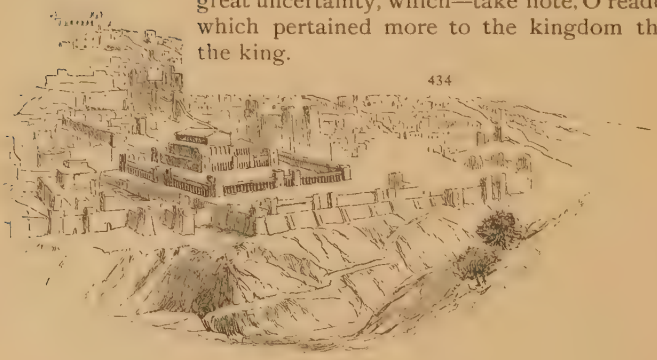
The king implied a kingdom; he was to be a warrior glorious as David, a ruler wise and magnificent as Solomon; the kingdom was to be a power against which Rome was to dash itself to pieces. There would be colossal war, and the agonies of death and birth — then peace, meaning, of course, Judean dominion forever.

Ben-Hur's heart beat hard as for an instant he had a vision of Jerusalem the capital of the world, and Zion, the site of the throne of the Universal Master.

It seemed to the enthusiast rare fortune that the man who had seen the king was at the tent to which he was going. He could see him there, and hear him, and learn of him what all he knew of the coming change, especially all he knew of the time of its happening. If it were at hand, the campaign with Maxentius should be abandoned; and he would go and set about organizing and arming the tribes, that Israel might be ready when the great day of the restoration began to break.

Now, as we have seen, from Balthasar himself Ben-Hur had the marvellous story. Was he satisfied?

There was a shadow upon him deeper than that of the cluster of palms—the shadow of a great uncertainty, which—take note, O reader! which pertained more to the kingdom than the king.



"What of this kingdom? And what is it to be?" Ben-Hur asked himself in thought.

Thus early arose the questions which were to follow the Child to his end, and survive him on earth—incomprehensible in his day, a dispute in this—an enigma to all who do not or cannot understand that every man is two in one—a deathless Soul and a mortal Body.

"What is it to be?" he asked.

For us, O reader, the Child himself has answered; but for Ben-Hur there were only the words of Balthasar, "On the earth, yet not of it—not for men, but for their souls—a dominion, nevertheless, of unimaginable glory."

What wonder the hapless youth found the phrases but the darkening of a riddle?

"The hand of man is not in it," he said, despairingly. "Nor has the king of such a kingdom use for men; neither toilers, nor councillors, nor soldiers. The earth must die, or be made anew, and for government new principles must be discovered—something besides armed hands — something in place of Force. But what?"

Again, O reader!

That which we will not see, he could not. The power there is in Love had not yet occurred to any man; much less had one come saying directly that for government and its objects—peace and order—Love is better and mightier than Force.

In the midst of his reverie a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"I have a word to say, O son of Arrius,"

said Ilderim, stopping by his side—"A word, and then I must return, for the night is going."

"I give you welcome, sheik."

"As to the things you have heard but now," said Ilderim, almost without pause, "take in belief all save that relating to the kind of kingdom the Child will set up when he comes; as to so much keep virgin mind until you hear Simonides the merchant—a good man here in Antioch, to whom I will make you known. The Egyptian gives you coinage of his dreams which are too good for the earth; Simonides is wiser; he will ring you the sayings of your prophets, giving book and page, so you cannot deny that the Child will be King of the Jews in fact—aye, by the splendor of God! a king as Herod was, only better and far more magnificent. And then, see you, we will taste the sweetness of vengeance. I have said. Peace to you!"

"Stay—sheik!"

If Ilderim heard his call, he did not stay.

"Simonides again!" said Ben-Hur, bitterly. "Simonides here, Simonides there; from this one now, then from that! I am like to be well ridden by my father's servant, who knows at least to hold fast that which is mine; wherefore he is richer, if indeed he be not wiser, than the Egyptian. By the covenant! it is not to the faithless a man should go to find a faith to keep—and I will not. But, hark! singing—and the voice a woman's—or an angel's? It comes this way."

Down the lake towards the dowar came a woman singing. Her voice floated along the

hushed water melodious as a flute, and louder growing each instant. Directly the dipping of oars was heard in slow measure; a little later the words were distinguishable—words in purest Greek, best fitted of all the tongues of the day for the expression of passionate grief.

THE LAMENT.

(*Egyptian.*)

"I sigh as I sing for the story land
Across the Syrian sea.
The odorous winds from the musky sand
Were breaths of life to me.
They play with the plumes of the whispering palm
For me, alas! no more;
No more does the Nile in the moonlit calm
Moan past the Memphian shore.

"O Nilus! thou god of my fainting soul!
In dreams thou comest to me;
And, dreaming, I play with the lotus bowl,
And sing old songs to thee;
And hear from afar the Memnonian strain,
And calls from dear Simbel;
And wake to a passion of grief and pain
That e'er I said—Farewell!"

At the conclusion of the song the singer was past the cluster of palms. The last word—farewell—floated past Ben-Hur weighted with all the sweet sorrow of parting. The passing of the boat was as the passing of a deeper shadow into the deeper night.

Ben-Hur drew a long breath hardly distinguishable from a sigh.

"I know her by the song—the daughter of

Balthasar. How beautiful it was! And how beautiful is she!"

He recalled her large eyes curtained slightly by the drooping lids, the cheeks oval and rosy rich, the lips full and deep with dimpling in the corners, and all the grace of the tall, lithe figure.

"How beautiful she is!" he repeated.

And his heart made answer by a quickening of its movement.

Then, almost the same instant, another face, younger and quite as beautiful—more childlike and tender, if not so passionate—appeared as if held up to him out of the lake.

"Esther!" he said, smiling. "As I wished, a star has been sent to me."

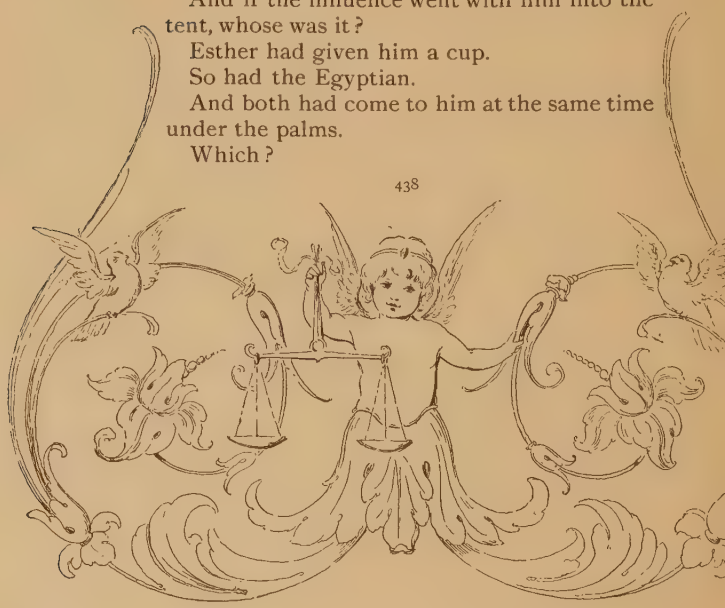
He turned, and passed slowly back to the tent.

His life had been crowded with griefs and with vengeful preparations—too much crowded for love. Was this the beginning of a happy change?

And if the influence went with him into the tent, whose was it?

Esther had given him a cup.

So had the Egyptian.

And both had come to him at the same time under the palms.

Which?